

JORDAN, DIEDRIA HOWELL, Ed.D. The Role of the Black Church in Socializing African American Students for School Success: A Collective Case Study into the Nature of Prophetic Activism. (2012)

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Little attention has been given to the potential role of faith-based institutions in fostering academic achievement through socialization. One goal of this study is to reveal that link. For many African American students, the public education system has not successfully prepared them for citizenry as required by today's global community. An urgent research need, therefore, is to identify readily available community resources to address the underachievement of African American students enrolled in today's public schools. The purpose of this study is to discover how the social support efforts of black church goers positively impact the academic experiences of African American youth.

This qualitative study, involving two black churches, explored the prevalence of "prophetic activism" within black churches that address the social and academic needs of African American youth. The term prophetic activism is used to describe church activism that extends beyond the walls of the black church to reach all African American youth within the community in which the black church is anchored. The findings of this study illuminate how successful collaboration between educators and black churches leads to prophetic activism. This research has the potential to lend valuable insight into policies and procedures that school leaders develop in order to forge community collaboration with black churches.

THE ROLE OF THE BLACK CHURCH IN SOCIALIZING AFRICAN AMERICAN  
STUDENTS FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS: A COLLECTIVE CASE  
STUDY INTO THE NATURE OF  
PROPHETIC ACTIVISM

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

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**I dedicate this doctoral dissertation to ...**

**My husband, Anthony Jordan**

Most of us cannot recall the exact date that our lives took a different path; however, I can. On June 6, 1990, I met you and my life forever changed. You have been a constant in my life. You have been there to share in my joys and my pains. When people asked me how I balanced life, work, and school my response was always, “I have a GREAT husband!”

Without your support, I *know* that this process would not have been possible. I look forward to each new day with you. You are my best friend and I love you!

**My children, Micayla & Dillon Jordan**

I love being your mother! You two are the inspiration behind my work. Thanks for the joy you bring to my life. In you I have both completion and a hope for a glorious future. May you always know that you are fearfully and wonderfully made. I pray that you will always give the world your best and expect nothing less in return.

**My parents, Timothy C. Howell (1946 – 1991) & Harvetta Howell Fuller**

Thanks for creating in me a desire for learning. Thanks for your sacrifice. Now, that I am a parent I have a greater appreciation for your unselfish love and dedication. Mama, I am so glad that you have been there for all of my accomplishments; thank you for your support. Daddy, you are not here physically, but your sweet spirit remains.

**My other parents, Marion & Judy Whitsett**

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**My grandparents, the late George & Ellease Howell and the late Ella Moore**

I also dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my wonderful grandparents. The love they had for God helped me to develop a strong faith that continues to strengthen me each day. I look in the mirror and see all the hope they instilled in me for a better future where one is truly judge by the content of their character and not the color of their skin.

***For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.***

***Jeremiah 29:11***

## APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The most pressing challenge facing our nation is discovering effective tools that public schools can use to help all of America's children meet the standards necessary to live, learn, work, communicate, and be productive citizens in today's highly technological, global community of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Jones, 2002). Extracting from Longest and Huber's (2010) definition of public institutions, the term *public school* can be used to describe institutions that accept federal, state, and/or local government funding and are held accountable to federal and/or state legislative, executive, and/or judicial policies that govern the educational services of youth in Kindergarten through grade 12. Unfortunately, for African American students, public schools are places in which only small percentages of them experience academic success (Crummell, 2007; Graham<sup>1</sup>, 2008; Hale, 1982; McCray, Grant & Beachum, 2010). The public school system has not properly prepared many African American students for a successful life after their K–12 academic experience (i.e., college entry, entry level career opportunities) and thusly has not prepared these students for global citizenry (McCray et al., 2010). The purpose of this study was to address how African American communities, specifically black churches, can serve as educational partners to help prepare African American public school students for academic success.

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<sup>1</sup>To maintain the anonymity of study participants; the name of the school district that published this document has been omitted from the citation. The full reference citation was provided to the Dissertation Committee Chair. The reference citation has been marked accordingly.

Many of the policies that aim to address the underachievement of African American students lack the visionary leadership that provides effective tools for academic success (Hale, 2004). For example, educational policies, such as the *Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) Act of 2001* (commonly known as *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001*) – which is a federal, landmark educational policy created during the G.W. Bush Administration – are designed to change the culture of America’s public schools and increase student achievement. However, such policies are filled with top-down mandates consisting of politicians punishing school districts for failure to meet specified achievement standards on state approved standardized achievement tests (Hale, 2004; United States Department of Education, n.d.). In October 2011, in exchange for comprehensive plans to improve teaching and learning for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction; the Obama Administration allowed the United States Department of Education to accept flexibility requests regarding specific requirements of NCLB (United States Department of Education, 2010). However, even with flexibility waivers, policies, such as the current ESEA of 2001, do little to show public school leaders proactive steps that can be implemented to improve the learning conditions of African American students.

Many policies fail to address the structure of a public institution, which has been designed to ensure infinite advantages for middle to upper-income white students while ignoring the race, ethnicity, and cultural needs of African American students (Hale, 2004; Hawley & Nieto, 2010). For example, a memorandum from Rebecca B. Garland, Chief Academic Officer, and Angela H. Quick, Deputy Chief Academic Officer, addressed to

North Carolina Superintendents detailed the North Carolina Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) Targets as a part of the ESEA flexibility request for both reading and mathematics for all federally recognized ethnic subgroups. According to this memorandum, by the academic year, 2016-17, African American students in grades three through eight should have a 77.0 proficiency rate in the area of reading; while the proficiency target for Caucasian students has been set at 90.8 (R.B. Garland and A.H. Quick, personal communication, June 13, 2012). The African American proficiency rate for mathematics for the same grade levels has been set at 84.4, while the Caucasian target has been set at 94.8 (R.B. Garland and A.H. Quick, personal communication, June 13, 2012). Although the memorandum provides the targets it does not address if community input was sought to set the targets. The memorandum does not provide documentation as to why a projected gap of 13.8 points between African American and Caucasian students in reading and a 10.4 point gap in the area of mathematics is acceptable. Additionally, the memorandum does not provide insight to any programs that will be offered to assist schools in aligning instruction to the cultural needs of African American students. In order to address the underachievement of African American students, educational policies and practices must be written with a focus that addresses the importance of race, ethnicity, and community involvement (Barton, 2004; Comer, 2002; Comer & Haynes, 1990; Denbo, 2002; Hale, 2004; Hawley & Nieto, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003).

Unfortunately, some of the panic concerning current educational policies forces many school leaders to focus solely on the changes needed within the public school



building while overlooking the fact that learning occurs both within and out of the public school building (Barton, 2004). Educators must come to understand that African American families and communities respect and value education (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Hawley & Nieto, 2010). In order to improve the learning conditions of African American students enrolled in public schools, collaborative relationships must be formed between African American families, African American communities, and public schools. Such collaborative partnerships would be categorized by shared vision and goals, a high level of trust, mutual respect and responsibility, open communication, and strong school and community leadership (Johnson, Zorn, Tam, LaMontagne, & Johnson, 2003; Weinberg, Zetlin, & Shea, 2009). No longer is it sufficient for public schools and African American communities to work in isolation and blame each other for the underachievement of African American students attending public schools. There seems to be widespread agreement regarding the important role of families in the education of students; however, little emphasis is focused on increasing the involvement of African American families, communities, and, in particular, black churches (McCarty et al., 2010; Mitchell, 2010; Witherspoon, 2002). This study served as an exploration into how black churches, as significant members of African American communities, can be used as a tool in addressing the learning needs of African American students attending public schools.

With approximately 10 million members, Protestant Christian places of worship remain the largest religious denominations found in African American communities (Black and Christian, n.d.; Pinn, 2006). According to Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), there

are seven historic black denominations: African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church; African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church; Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church; National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated (NBC); National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Since the publication of Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) book, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, two additional denominations have developed: National Missionary Baptist Convention (NMBC) and Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship (FGBCF); both are progenies of denominations found in Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) historic black denominations list (Black and Christian, n.d.). In addition to its association to Protestant, Christian places of worship, the term black church is used to describe the blending of various religious experiences (e.g., the multiple denominations of Protestant, Christian religion) that exist in African American communities (Pinn, 2006). Within some African American communities, the term black church is used to designate the commonality that exists among Protestant, Christian denominations as it relates to addressing some of the social and spiritual needs of African American communities (Dantley, 2005; West, 1982). The term describes an institution - the church- that slaves freely developed (Savage, 2008).

For the purpose of this paper, the term *black church* will be used to describe Protestant, Christian places of worship and their offspring that are of historical significance to African American communities. These institutions are comprised of a majority of African American congregants and aim to address both the spiritual and

social needs of their congregations and the African American communities in which they are centered (Hamilton, 1975; Lincoln, 1974; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Moss, 2003; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Pinn, 2006). It is important to acknowledge that black church goers, both members and nonmembers, are the reason why black churches have been successful in addressing the social needs of African American communities (Calhoun-Brown, 2003; Gilkes, 2001; Higginbotham, 1993; McAdoo, 2007; Wiggins, 2005). Additionally, it is important to understand that not all African Americans are members of or attend black, Protestant, Christian places of worship. Therefore, when reading this paper the reader must be aware that the characteristics ascribed to the black church do not relate to a particular building or place; rather they are directed to African American, Protestant, Christian church goers as a challenge to use their Christian faith not only as a means of evangelizing but as a way to address social inequality as well (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Hale, 2001; McAdoo, 2007; Pinn, 2006). This study focused on the collective activism that African American, Protestant church goers can embark upon in an effort to address the underachievement of African American students attending public schools - regardless of the student's church attendance.

At this point it is important to acknowledge that throughout this study, the term black and African American will be used to describe Americans of African descent. According to Ghee (1990), the term African American acknowledges the African heritage and culture while denoting commonality with other American citizens. As Ghee (1990) states:

A central goal in race relations is to create a sense of commonality and togetherness (family) among all races in the American “melting pot” or “mosaic” as advocated by the likes of Dr. Martin L. King. In each nuclear family there is a specific numerator (first name) designating one’s “unique” gene pool within the family unit and a common denominator designating the “common” gene pool of the family clan. (p. 77)

Therefore, in order to foster a conceptual family definition of our nation, we must in the same way provide a “discriminating numerator” (e.g., African) and a “common denominator” (i.e., American) (Ghee, 1990). The emphasis is placed on the “common denominator”, American, which offers a generic, geographic-based definition for all American people of various ethnic backgrounds. Whereas the term African American can be used to show commonality and honors African culture and tradition; the term, black, is often used to show deviance. The term black was initially used to highlight skin color differences, which is used as a central component of racism (Ghee, 1990).

One of the purposes of this paper is to highlight the underachievement of an ethnic group and to demonstrate how the underachievement of this group can, in some part, be contributed to race. Therefore, it is important that both terms, black and African American, are used to illustrate how the educational system has been impacted by racism - which is implied by the racial term, black. Additionally, it is important that both terms are used to bring to the forefront the need to restructure our public schools by acknowledging both the common and unique learning needs of a culture sharing group – which is implied by the term, African American. Although the terms black and African American are often used interchangeably, one of the terms (i.e., black) has been historically used to highlight assumed inferiority of a group of people whereas the other

term (i.e., African American) was created to celebrate and acknowledge the cultural differences of a group of people and to highlight the geographic commonality this group has to other ethnic groups that comprise our nation (Ghee, 1990). The term, black, can be used as an adjective that describes an attribute of a group of people; whereas, the term, African American, can be used as a noun that identifies a group of people and their common culture. Therefore, in this paper “black” will be used as an adjective to describe a racial attribute and “African American” will be used as the noun that identifies those who share cultural attributes. The information that follows provides an overview of the underachievement of African American students and highlights how the educational services provided to black youth may be impacted by their race.

### **Statement of the Problem**

For this study, I reviewed data that illustrated the underachievement of African American students enrolled in a North Carolina urban school district that is located in the same county as the two black churches that were the focus of my study. The data from this school district aligns with national trends and provides the basis for my argument that the education of African Americans attending public schools is in a crisis state and must be addressed. In addition to the statistics that will be provided, a review of the literature revealed that much attention has been given to the achievement gap, which is described as the significant difference between the performance of white and black students on standardized achievement tests with white students, as a whole, scoring higher than black students (Aub, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Barton, 2004; Denbo & Jones, 2002; Hillard, 2001; Parker, 2001; Price, 2008). Resources are needed both in and out of the public

school building to address the achievement gap; therefore, this study was needed to identify how black churches can help.

Test results for the selected North Carolina urban school district revealed that African American students in this district were achieving at rates lower than white students (Oretta School System<sup>2</sup> [OSS], 2009). The data for this school system showed that in this district black and white students comprised a similar student population; both were roughly at 40%. However, despite the fact that black and white students contributed to the total system population equally, in all other areas of school success, the achievement of white students exceeded that of black students. In this school system, black students were more likely to participate in the Exceptional Children's (EC) program that serves students with learning disabilities. The total percentage of the district's EC population was 35%; of that population 22% was African American (OSS, 2009). In this district, African American males were 2.84 times more likely to be identified as Intellectually Disabled – Mild when compared to all other students (OSS, 2011). On the contrary, when compared to their total population, black students were significantly underrepresented in the Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) program. African American students made up approximately 16% of the district's AIG population (OSS, 2009). Additionally, black male students were suspended at greater rates when compared to any other population represented in this school system (OSS, 2008). In addition to these statistics, the actions of the current Superintendent showcased

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<sup>2</sup> To protect the anonymity of study participants a pseudonym is being used for the selected North Carolina school district. Complete reference information was provided to the Dissertation Committee Chair. The reference citation has been marked accordingly.

that African American student achievement was a major area of concern for this district. In 2009-10, this district implemented a new strategic plan. As a part of that plan, a dedicated central office staff was commissioned with the sole purpose of focusing on the unique needs of the district's most impacted schools (e.g., higher number of Free and Reduced Lunch, higher number of suspensions, higher number of EC population, and low test scores). All ten schools assigned to this special central-office staff had an African American student population that was greater than 70%, which far exceeded the district's 40% African American total population (OSS, 2009).

Unfortunately, the under achievement of African American students is not limited to this North Carolina urban school district. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), African Americans account for a smaller percentage of the United States' total population; however, African American students are more likely than whites to score below proficient on federal achievement tests. Table 1 illustrates the performance of white and black students on the 1990 and 2009 administrations of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is administered annually to students in grades four and eight in all states (Aub et al., 2010).

**Table 1**

**1990 and 2009 NAEP Achievement Levels (Percentages)**

Race	Grade 4						Grade 8					
	At or above Basic		At or above Proficient		At Advanced		At or above Basic		At or above Proficient		At Advanced	
	1990	2009	1990	2009	1990	2009	1990	2009	1990	2009	1990	2009
White	59	91	16	51	2	8	60	83	18	44	2	11
Black	17	64	1	16	<0	1	22	50	5	12	<0	1

In our nation, as well as in the selected North Carolina urban school district, black students are not performing at a level consistent with their white counterparts. The current United States' Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, has called the underachievement of African American students in today's public schools the civil rights issue of our generation (McCray et al., 2010). The underachievement of African American students in today's public schools serves as a challenge to black church goers encouraging them to return to the black church's historic role of civic engagement and the fight for social justice (Madyun & Witherspoon, 2010). Although little attention has been given to the responsibility and potential role of faith-based institutions in fostering academic achievement through youth socialization and collaboration with schools, the purpose of this study was to reveal that link (Mitchell, 2010; Powell Pruitt, 2004; Witherspoon, 2002).

### **Overview of the Literature**

This study was informed by literature related to historical black church activism and the significance black churches have in African American communities (Gaines, 2010; Lincoln, 1974; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Mitchell, 2010; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Pinn, 2002; Pinn, 2006); black church leadership as it relates to the role of black females in black churches (Gilkes, 2001; Higginbotham, 1993; Wiggins, 2005); and institutional racism and its impact on African American student achievement (Comer, 2002; Comer & Haynes, 1990; Denbo & Jones, 2002; Hale, 1982; Hale, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1997). The literature suggests that the underachievement of many African American students can be attributed to institutional racism and can be viewed as the civil rights issue of the



21<sup>st</sup> century (Comer & Haynes, 1990; Denbo & Jones, 2002; Hale, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 1997; McCray et al., 2010). The literature highlights the historical role the black church has had in addressing various forms of social discrimination, which can be used as both a motivator and justification for the black church's involvement in the education of African American students attending today's public schools. Finally, the literature also suggests that services provided by black churches rely heavily upon the commitment that black females have pledged to the black church.

The historical significance of the black church as it relates to addressing social issues of African American communities inspired this study. The black church can be viewed as the conduit for the resiliency and vitality of many African American communities (McAdoo, 2007). The black church has been instrumental in providing support to African American communities that has helped African Americans withstand slavery, segregation, and other forms of social discrimination (Franklin, 2007). The black church's role during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s - which is categorized by the nonviolent actions of protest used by African Americans to bring attention to the systemic patterns of racial segregation and oppression - provides an example of the historic social activism found within the walls of black churches (African American Odyssey, n.d.; Baldwin, 2003; Stanley, 1990). It shows that historically black churches have served their communities in a way that combines an emphasis on spiritual development and active participation in worldly affairs (Gaines, 2010; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Savage, 2008; Swarts, 2008). During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, black churches provided the ideological and theological underpinning for the

movement by reminding black church goers of their obligation to be peaceful in their quest to level inequalities and alleviate chasms between black and white Americans (Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Pinn, 2006, Stanley, 1990).

Although African Americans are no longer subjected to the same levels of racism as those present during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the literature suggests that much of the underachievement of African American students can be attributed to race-related factors (Comer & Haynes, 1990; Comer, 2002; Denbo & Jones, 2002; Hale, 1982; Hale, 2004; Hillard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1997). The black church has a history of addressing issues involving race and the attainment of governmental rights, such as the right to have a free and appropriate public education (Billings, 1966). Black church goers, specifically women, are instrumental to the black church's success in addressing the needs of African American communities (Calhoun-Brown, 2003; Gilkes, 2001; Higginbotham, 1993; McAdoo, 2007; Wiggins, 2005). Because of the significance the black female has in black churches, any efforts to mobilize black churches on issues of African American student achievement will rest heavily upon the shoulders of women. To the black church, black females' activities and commitments form an indispensable framework on which black religion survives (Gilkes, 2001).

The literature highlights the historical significance the black church has had in addressing social issues that impact African Americans; however, there are gaps in the literature as it relates to the specific actions black church leaders and black church goers can take to address the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of African American youth. Today's black churches have the potential to be prophetic in their service to African

American communities. The term *prophetic* is used by many scholars to describe actions taken by black churches that focus on the spiritual development of black church goers as well as ensure that all members of African American communities are provided with the resources necessary to pursue life, liberty, and justice (Billings, 1966; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; McDaniel, 2008; McRoberts, 2003; Moss, 2003; Pinn, 2006; Savage, 2008; Wesley, 2007; West, 1982; Zalot, 2003). For African American students this means that black churches may have the necessary resources to develop and nurture the skills needed for school success (Hale, 1982; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

### **Overview of the Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study drew upon the centrality of race and racism in American society that comes out of critical race theory (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delanty, 2009; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Farr, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995); Bandura's (1986) social learning theory; and the concept of prophetic activism (McDaniel, 2008; McRoberts, 2003; Swartz, 2008; West, 1982). The centrality of race and racism in American society was used to address systemic racism and theorize why black church goers should concern themselves with the underachievement of African American students attending public schools. Social learning theory was used to address the social skills that are used to socialize students for school success. The concept of prophetic activism was used to describe the conditions that move black church activism beyond the walls of the church.

Critical race theory places emphasis on race and views racism as a system that understates the power of privilege (California State University, 1999; Crenshaw et al.,

1995; Delanty, 2009; Delgado & Stefanie, 2001; Farr, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As it relates to this study, the centrality of race and racism in American society was used to explain how race impacts the student-teacher relationship that exists between African American students and public school educators. The second body of theory is social learning theory, which was used to address how socialization is used to help individuals obtain the values, beliefs, and actions viewed appropriate for the system in which they live (Bandura, 1986; Baron, Bryne, & Watson, 1997). In this study, social learning theory was used to explain how members of black churches create, sustain, and promote school success by using modeling and motivation, which are two social learning techniques. The final concept relates to faith-based activism and is based upon the works of McDaniel (2008), McRoberts (2003), Swartz (2008) and West (1982). McRoberts (2003) states that black church activism refers to “very extroverted forms of religious presence – forms that somehow benefit not only congregation members but people who do not belong to the church” (p. 100). The highest level of black church activism is prophetic service that focuses on service to both church and non-church members and social justice issues, such as the underachievement of African American students, which impact the whole community unit. In this study, McRoberts (2003) explanation of *prophetic activism* was used to describe actions taken by black churches that address not only the academic needs of African American youth attending black churches, but are also extended to address the academic needs of all African American youth attending public schools in which the black churches are anchored.

## **Overview of the Research Design**

In order to describe the black church's role in the socialization of African American youth for school success this qualitative study used a collective case study research design method. According to Creswell (2007), a case study is used when the researcher desires to understand a problem using a bounded system to illustrate a problem and possible solutions to a problem. In a case study, a system can be bounded by time, event, or, as with this study, place and purpose (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 1994). The bounded systems selected for this study was two black places of worships which were bounded by their commonality as churches (place) devoted to the Christian religion (purpose). For this study, the underachievement of African American students was identified as a problem and it was the assumption of this researcher that black churches are able to transmit positive achievement values that counteract student negativity and school disengagement, which may stem from institutional racism (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefanie, 2001; Hale, 2004; Hawley & Nieto, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Price, 2008).

The two black churches selected for this study had a reputation of public school service. The actions of these two black churches was used to identify and describe the presence and omission of prophetic activism as it relates to the ability of black church goers to socialize African American youth for school success. In agreement with Creswell's (2007) discussion of case study research design, I selected two black churches to show different perspectives on the role black churches have in socializing African American youth for school success. One of the selected churches is a mega-church, with

approximately 5,000 members on record. The second black church is a much smaller church, with approximately 400 members on record. Studying these two churches also helped to inform if church size and the availability of resources impact prophetic activism. Through this study I discovered the shared values, behaviors, and beliefs that impact a black church's ability to become prophetic in their service as well as examined if church size had any impact on black church activism. During a six month period, I participated in an in-depth data collection process that involved observations, interviews, and a review of church documents/artifacts relating to youth programming and services. I analyzed my observations, available church documents, and participant stories looking for themes that informed me as to the conditions needed to encourage and maintain prophetic activism as it relates to the black church's role in the academic needs of African American students attending public schools.

### **Research Questions**

In order to socialize African American students for school success, I anticipated that black church goers would have to provide prophetic service that models appropriate societal behavior and expectations while also providing motivators that encourage student success (Bandura, 1986; Price, 2008). The three research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) Why do black church goers become engaged in the education of African American youth attending public schools?

- 2) How do black church goers address the social and academic needs of African American school-aged youth in their community and who is responsible for implementing this work?
- 3) How can the academic support efforts of black churches inform education leaders in developing school partnerships with black churches?

The answers to these three research questions will highlight how black churches have the necessary resources to help socialize students for academic success and partner with public schools to help improve the learning conditions of African American students.

As a result of this study, school leaders will have access to information concerning the richness found within black churches as it relates to the social, cultural, and academic needs of African American youth attending public schools. Additionally, black church leaders who read this study will gain a better understanding of the current education conditions of African American students attending public schools and the actions black churches can take to socialize African American students for school success and create a culture of academic achievement. According to Wynn (2012), members of African American communities need to create a culture of academic achievement that values and celebrates academic achievement just as much as other extracurricular activities, such as community sports.

### **Next Chapters**

The data of the selected urban North Carolina school district reveals that African American students are achieving at rates much lower than their white counterparts. The data from this school district aligns with national trends and demonstrates that the

underachievement of African American students is the civil rights issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As will be discussed in Chapter II, a review of scholarly literature reveals that black churches have played a significant role in bringing issues of racial oppression to the forefront. The implementation of this study will be reviewed in Chapter III. The answer to the first of the three research questions will be provided in Chapter IV as well as a discussion that links the first research question to the centrality of race and racism in American society, which is one of the three components of the conceptual framework. Chapter V will provide a response to the second research question as well as discussion that links to the second component of the conceptual framework, social learning theory. In Chapter VI, the concluding chapter, I will provide a discussion of the last research question and link that discussion to prophetic activism, the last concept of the conceptual framework. Additionally, Chapter VI details how this study addresses school standards found in the North Carolina School Executive: Principal and Assistant Principal Evaluation Process (McRel, 2009). Again, the purpose of this study was to examine how the black church's historic role in matters of social justice can be recreated to address the current education crisis of African American school-aged youth enrolled in today's public schools. The discussion that will be provided in the remaining chapters is intended to highlight how the black church can be used as an out-of-the-school resource readily available to addressing the teaching and learning needs of African American youth.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

In this chapter, I will provide a review of the scholarly literature that informed this study; particularly, literature that addresses the black church, historical black church activism, the contemporary leadership of black women within the black church, and institutional racism. I will also describe the conceptual framework that guided this study, which was based upon the concept of prophetic activism. According to McRoberts (2003), prophetic activism describes community church involvement that extends beyond the walls of the church to benefit members of African American communities. However, it should be noted that other scholars describe prophetic activism not only in terms of who benefits from the services (i.e., inward verses outward church focus); but they also address the impact services provided by the church have on the economic and political empowerment of African Americans overall (Barnes, 2004; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). In addition to prophetic activism, the centrality of race and racism in American society and social learning theory were used to describe how black church goers use various social interactions to counteract the negative impact race has on the student-teacher relationship between African American youth and public school teachers.

#### **Part I – Literature Review**

The review of scholarly literature that follows is intended to highlight how the black church interfaces with members of African American communities to improve the

social conditions of African American citizens. Information from scholarly literature will be used to 1) describe historical black church activism and the significance black churches have in African American communities; 2) outline the components of church leadership as it relates to the role of black women; 3) illustrate the intersection of the black church and the black family caused by the significance the black female has to both institutions; and 4) describe institutional racism and its impact on African American student achievement. The overall purpose of the literature review is to highlight scholarly literature that speaks or makes inference to the possibility of school-family-black church partnerships.

**Historical Significance of the Black Church.** During the early colonies, many white Americans viewed the conversion of African slaves to Christianity as their called duty (Pinn, 2006). Many white colonists used Christianity as a means of teaching the African slaves their proper order in society, which, at the time, was to be obedient to their white masters. The white colonists viewed Christianity as a tool of social control to produce submissive slaves (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Savage, 2008). Many of the early white colonists viewed the African's conversion to Christianity as an economic strategy that would maintain the financial benefits of slavery (Wesley, 2007). Many white colonists allowed slaves to privately worship; therefore, according to Lincoln & Mamiya (1990), "religion became the only institutional area where the slaves also exercised a measure of freedom" (p. 200). For the early African slaves, black churches were the only widely accessible communal associations (Calhoun-Brown, 2003). Despite the fact that early slave owners used religion as a means of maintaining the status quo of slavery;

early slaves had a vision of God that was fostered in the early black church that emphasized God's disappointment in the inhumane treatment of His people (Pinn, 2006; Savage, 2008, Wesley, 2007). Since slavery to present day, black religion has countered any attempts to view a group of people as inferior solely based on the color of their skin (Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Pinn, 2006; Wesley, 2007).

In the United States, black religion has maintained a central focus in African American communities and black places of worship have been a major conduit for these communities' resiliency and vitality (Chireau & Deutsch, 2000; Conyers, 2007; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 2007; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; McAdoo, 2007; Moss, 2003; Pinn, 2002; Savage, 2008). In America, black churches represent a unique institution that has provided African Americans the ability to strengthen their social, economic, and political status (Hamilton, 1975; Johnson, 1975; Lincoln, 1974; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Madyun & Witherspoon, 2010; Mitchell, 2010; Moss, 2003). Black churches remain a place where African Americans are welcomed to fellowship with one another and offer support and guidance on various religious and social issues. Moss (2003) explains that initially, many African Americans are drawn to places of worship for opportunities to fellowship with others who share similar views regarding matters of spiritual development; however, it is the social development these institutions offer that has maintained the black church's significance in African American communities.

The black church has been instrumental in bringing to the forefront the paradox that exists between race relations in America and the freedoms and liberties guaranteed to all American citizens in the United States' Constitution (Billings, 1966; Gaines, 2010;

Madyun & Witherspoon, 2010; Zalot, 2003). Therefore, from a historical perspective what happens within the walls of the black church extends beyond the physical walls of the church building and reaches all members of the community – regardless of church affiliation. There are two periods of time that illustrate the historical role of the black in regards to mobilizing African Americans to confront issues of race that impact the African American pursuit of life, liberty, and justice. The first period of time is the period of Reconstruction, which lasted from 1867 to 1877; the second is the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. I find it necessary to highlight these two periods of time to provide historical examples that specifically show the strength of the black church and the ability this institution has to positively change societal thought regarding issues of race, ethnicity, and the attainment of power (Billings, 1966; Gaines, 2010; Hamilton, 1975; Johnson, 1975; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Moss, 2003; Savage, 2008; Wesley, 2007).

During the period of the Reconstruction, in the United States, the victorious North made an effort to create conditions that provided the freedom needed for African Americans (many of whom were former slaves) to freely participate in the United States as full citizens (National Park Services, n.d.). Although there is disagreement in the literature regarding the duration of this period, there is agreement on the impact Reconstruction had on African American communities (African American Odyssey, n.d.; Baxter, 2001; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Savage, 2008). Most historians agree that the Reconstruction period began with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1867 and concluded with the Southern Compromise of 1877, which removed federal troops from

the South (African American Odyssey, n.d.; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). During this period of time, black clergy were able to use sermons, personal theology and relationships to influence their male congregants regarding the importance of political activism (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). As a result of their influence, black church leaders convinced thousands of former male slaves to become registered voters. This influx of African American voters contributed to the election of two black United States Congressmen (African American Odyssey, n.d.; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Through the grass root efforts of organized black churches, for the first time African Americans were represented in the political structure of America. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the collective voting power influenced by black churches, African Americans continued to see some political gains as a result of the collective voting power influenced by black churches. However, in 1877, the removal of federal protection brought the period of Reconstruction to an end and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century lead the way for the ratification of Jim Crow segregation, in which African Americans were denied access to public facilities, participation in the political system, and other civil rights because of the color of their skin (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

The end of the Reconstruction period gave rebirth to the fight for equity and justice for African American communities Nelsen and Nelsen (1975) state that many people within African American communities viewed the black church as having the potential to invoke social action and change. According to Nelsen and Nelsen (1975):

By the late 1950s and the early 1960s the black community was especially anxious that a formal change occur in regard to the status of the black man in America; such a change would involve the lowering of race barriers, the passage of civil rights bills, and a greater movement toward an integrated society. (p. 57)

This process of change became known as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which was ushered in by the work of black churches (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Pinn, 2006; Savage, 2008).

During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, members of the African American community largely used nonviolent actions to protest against the systemic pattern of racial segregation (African American Odyssey, n.d.; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Savage, 2008; Stanley, 1990). Although, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s began during a time when Americans were not overly exposed to televised media, Savage (2008) explains, “the Civil Rights Movement entered our homes through the televised images of black churches opening their doors for political rallies and the funerals of martyrs” (p. 1). During this time, the black church served as the central coordinating unit of the movement (Beyerlein & Andrews, 2008; Dunston, 1989; Johnson, 1975; Killian, 1984; Morris, 1981; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Pinn, 2002; Savage, 2008). While the black church served as the central hub of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s it was black church leaders who became the face of the movement and provided the powerful sermons and speeches that moved people to political mobilization. Due to their prominence within African American communities, male ministers of black churches quickly emerged as the visible leaders of the movement (Killian, 1984; Pinn, 2002; Savage, 2008). Like their slave ancestors, during the Civil

Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, black church leaders had to address issues of inequity by presenting sermons that addressed the confinements of a segregated society. These leaders had to encourage their congregations to peacefully deal with the brutality of a segregated society (Martin & McAdoo, 2007; Pinn, 2006; Pipes, 2007). The success of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, with milestones such as the passage of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 – which banned segregation in all public facilities – highlighted the ability of black church leaders to mobilize African American communities for peaceful protest (Gill, 1991).

In the realm of education, one of the most impressive civil rights movements was the events that lead to the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. This Supreme Court case was actually based upon five separate cases from Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Delaware<sup>3</sup>. As individual cases, each plaintiff sought to challenge the previous Supreme Court ruling, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which rendered the court’s “separate but equal” ruling that became the constitutional basis for segregation (National Archives, n.d.). Each of the five cases were brought on the behalf of children who attended black schools that were inferior, in physical and financial resources, to white schools; and each case claimed that the “separate but equal” ruling violated the equal protection clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment (National Archives, n.d.). In 1952, the Supreme Court agreed to hear all five cases

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<sup>3</sup>*Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee, Kansas, et al.*; *Harry Briggs, Jr., et al. v. R.W. Elliott, et al.* (South Carolina); *Dorothy E. Davis et al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia, et al.*; *Spottswood Thomas Bolling et al. v. C. Melvin Sharpe et al.* (District of Columbia); *Francis B. Gebhart et al. v. Ethel Louise Belton et al.* (Delaware)

collectively. This provided a significant moment regarding education and civil rights because the consolidated case illustrated school segregation as a national issue not limited to the South (National Archives, n.d.).

Throughout the historical *Brown v. Board* hearings, and in most of the individual five cases, the black church served as a supportive unit. For example, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the Commonwealth of Virginia (*Davis v. Prince Edward County*), the only way an African American could receive a high school diploma was by attending a private academy. The public schools available to blacks served children in grades one through eight (National Archives, n.d.). During this time period, black churches operated private high schools. In Prince Edward County, schooling for blacks was considered progressive. This was partly due to the fund-raising efforts of the Farmville Colored Women's Club, which held most meeting and fund raising efforts in local black churches (CORE, n.d.; Kansas Historical Society, n.d.; National Archives, n.d.). Through their funding raising efforts the Farmville Colored Women's Club was able to build a school to address the education needs of black students in grades ninth through twelfth. However, despite fundraising efforts the education facility still consisted of inadequate space and equipment (i.e., science laboratories) for the black students. When the time came to challenge the educational opportunities afforded to blacks in Prince George County black preachers, Reverend Vernon Jones and Reverend Francis Griffin were instrumental in providing advice that helped the black community push for change (Kansas Historical Society, n.d.).



Likewise, in Clarendon County, South Carolina schools for black youth began in black churches, specifically in African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches (CORE, n.d.). The South Carolina case stemmed from the accidental encounter of two black preachers, Reverend James Hinton and Reverend J.A. DeLaine. Both preachers were concerned with the state of the education facilities for black students attending Clarendon County schools. Like the Prince George County and Clarendon County cases, blacks in Topeka, Kansas were concerned with the substandard facilities, out-of-date textbooks, and lack of school supplies. However, the black citizens of Topeka Kansas never questioned the dedication and qualifications of the African American principals and teachers assigned to their schools (CORE, n.d.). The main plaintiff in the *Brown* case, Oliver L. Brown, was an AME minister (Patterson, 2007; CORE, n.d.; National Archives, n.d.). Although the Virginia, South Carolina, and Kansas cases highlight the supportive role of black churches and their leaders; the District of Columbia case highlights the absence of the black church and may provide insight into the inactivity of today's modern black church on issues involving public education.

Since its inception, the District of Columbia, commonly referred to as Washington, D.C., has had a significant African American population (CORE, n.d.). However, during the civil rights era, the city did not provide positive examples of race relations – it simply reflected the customs of the time that were rooted in racial segregation (CORE, n.d.). By 1950, the traditional African American community leadership (i.e., black churches and the NAACP) had failed to organize any protest against the dilapidated educational facilities. The case against the substandard, black

educational facilities in Washington, D.C. was spearheaded by Gardner Bishop, owner of a black barbershop, and later represented by Attorney Charles Hamilton (CORE, n.d.). Despite the absence of collective black leadership, Bishop was determined to bring the issue of the substandard learning facilities to the forefront. Bishop felt that the community leaders, including black church leaders, had become too concerned with their own power status or the influence of their institution within the community. As will be discussed in Chapter V, today many black churches fail to collaborate on issues regarding the academic needs of African American children. This study can provide the foundation to support additional research investigating the lack of collaboration of black churches or the absence of black churches on various social issues.

As it relates to education today, a key component of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, as highlighted by the *Brown v. Board* case, that is still relevant today is the need to improve the educational conditions for African American students attending public schools (Beyerlein & Andrews, 2008; Billings, 1966; Johnson, 1975; Killian, 1984; Savage, 2008). This ongoing need has the potential to refocus the attention of black church goes to the government's failed duty to safeguard the inherited birthrights of all citizens - including African American youth - to have life, liberty, and the opportunity for happiness (Billings, 1966; Zalot, 2003). The literature provides examples that speak specifically to the role the black church has played in addressing government policies (including educational policies) that disadvantage African American citizens because of skin color (Baldwin, 2003; Beyerlein & Andrews, 2008; Calhoun-Brown, 2003; Dunston, 1989; Fluker, 2003; Howard-Piney, 2003; Lincoln & Mamiya,

1990). The literature also highlights how prior to and immediately after emancipation, and during periods of social injustice, such as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, black churches lead efforts to increase African American literacy (Gilkes, 2001; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Pinn, 2006; Wiggins, 2005). Unfortunately, there is little information available in the literature that speaks specifically to the current ways in which black churches can involve themselves with African American students, their families, and their schools in an effort to improve the current academic performance of African American youth attending public schools

**Contemporary Black Church Leadership.** The period of Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s illustrate how the black church has been the center arena for black activism and leadership (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; National Park Services, n.d.; Savage, 2008). From the end of the Reconstruction era until the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1964, members of African American communities were excluded from the mainstream political process. However, in their black churches, African Americans could choose their leaders, select pastors, bishops, trustees, deacons, the presidents of conventions, women's auxiliaries, etc. Therefore, during this period of time, the black church became an official training camp for activism and the development of black church leadership (Beyerlein & Andrews, 2008; Dunston, 1989; Johnson, 1975; Killian, 1984; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Morris, 1981; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Pinn, 2002; Savage, 2008). Collaborative partnerships between black churches and public schools will be dependent upon quality leadership (Johnson et al.,

2003; Weinberg et al., 2009). Therefore, it is necessary to understand both the historical and contemporary views of black church leadership.

To date, the historical understandings of how black church leadership impacts collaborative efforts between the black church and political/governmental institutions has been largely informed by the works of black male scholars, who include: W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950), and Benjamin Mays (1894-1984) (*African American Odyssey*, n.d.; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Pinn, 2002; Savage, 2008). Du Bois, Woodson, and Mays each sought to discover ways the black church could be used as a collective resource in the fight against racial, economic, and political oppression (Savage, 2008). Du Bois, a sociologist, saw the importance of the home, especially fathers, as being an important influence on politically empowered African Americans (Du Bois, 1903; Savage, 2008). For Woodson, a historian, the male leaders within black churches had the most influence on the success of African American communities because the male leaders were the ones who could mobilize their congregations (Savage, 2008; Woodson, 1921). According to Mays, a theologian, the male leadership of the black church was also the most important factor in creating racial leadership and activism (Mays, 1971; Savage, 2008). Though Du Bois, Woodson, and Mays, each linked the significance of the black church to the black, male church leader; the accomplishments of black, male church leaders can be attributed, in part, to the sacrifice and contributions of all black church goers – especially women (Gilkes, 2001; Higginbotham, 1993; Wiggins, 2005).

Although, in many black churches, black male ministers are viewed as the symbolic figure head; their role should not dismiss the collective efforts of all members, in particularly black women activists (Gilkes, 2001; Higginbotham, 1993; Wiggins, 2005). Contemporary views of black church leadership should recognize the power black women have in and to the black church (Gilkes, 2001). In American society, places of worship are voluntary institutions, meaning that Americans are free to choose if and where they will worship (Calhoun-Brown, 2003). Black males make up a much smaller percentage – about 10% to 25% – of the total population of black church goers (Gilkes, 2001; Wiggins, 2005). However, because of the historical view of black church leadership, in black churches, black males serve in leadership roles (e.g., senior pastor, lead deacons, lead trustees, etc.) at a much higher percentage than black females (Gilkes, 2001; Higginbotham, 1993; Savage, 2008; Wiggins, 2005). The demographics of the black church have remained consistent since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; as Wiggins (2005), states, “Enter most African American congregations and you are likely to see male pastors standing before predominately female audiences” (p. 1). However, understanding that places of worship are voluntary institutions further highlights the importance of the black female to the black church. Despite the fact that they are responsible for positions/roles that historically have not been viewed as a leadership position, these ladies choose to attend their selected places of worship and actively commit to the institution (Higginbotham, 1993).

Today, there is still a tendency to view black churches as places of sociopolitical change headed by African American male pastors. This view obscures the critical roles

African American females have in black churches (Gilkes, 2001). Due to their involvement in the church, the women of the black church are essential to the institution's success through services in the form of: "soloists, ushers, nurses, church mothers, Sunday school teachers, missionaries, pastor's aides, deaconesses, stewardesses, or prayer warriors" (Wiggins, 2005, p. 2). Black females have been able to carry their religious zeal beyond the walls of religious institutions by taking their message into the streets, houses and schools of their communities (Gilkes, 2001). Through their church service, black females have organized homes for the youth, organized political clubs, campaigned for women's suffrage, and participated in a variety of activities designed to promote social change and advance the interests of African American communities (Gilkes, 2001). Within the black church women exhibit leadership in their congregations in numerous ways that make the black church a vital house of worship and a cornerstone of support to the community it serves. Therefore, as stated by Wiggins (2005), "Women have exercised influence with or without the title of preacher" (p. 113). Although, I have highlighted roles that black females have in the black church other than senior pastor; I must acknowledge that, although rare, some black churches are headed by black females (Riggs, 1997; Wiggins, 2005). The black female experience, in the black church, has been a part of the larger historical role of the black female, which emphasizes independence, self-reliance, strength, and autonomy while contradicting the dominant culture's expectations of women (Gilkes, 2001; Wiggins, 2005). The various duties and responsibilities black females have in the black church showcase the strength of the black female. Therefore, contemporary views of black church leadership should be categorized

by the collective efforts of both the senior pastors and the congregation, which typically consists of a majority female congregant (Calhoun-Brown, 2003; Smith & Smidt, 2003). Not only is the black female critical to the success of the black church, she is often the cornerstone of the black family as we, which will be highlighted in the next section (Hine, 2007; McAdoo, 2007).

**The African American Family.** The African American family has endured many hardships. Although, some historians have placed in the literature rhetoric about gentle, kind slave owners who refused to separate African families; there is scholarly evidence and dramatic representation of early slave life that provide insight into the inhumane treatment of early African Americans families (African American Odyssey, n.d.; Franklin, 2007; Lincoln, 1974; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Morrison, 1987; Pinn, 2006; Savage, 2008). Slave owners were not concerned with the preservation of the African family; rather they were concerned with the profit the African – whether male, female, or child – could bring to the slave owner as his property (Davis, 1981; Franklin, 2007). Once they arrived on American soil, all Africans were forced to adjust to an unfamiliar environment and most were separated from biological family members. Therefore, as Franklin (2007) suggest, the African American family has been under cease since the arrival of the first Africans to America.

In her book, *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles*, Janice C. Hale (1982) provides a vivid description of the early attack on the African culture, which impacted the African American family:

One of the unfortunate results of the American slavery experience was the de-Africanization experience that converted the African into a Negro. The newly arrived Africans were prohibited from using their native language and were forced to adopt the English language along with its view of the universe. They were forced to learn words and systems of thought that defined their color as evil and their culture as heathen and savage. They were forced to accept new names. No longer were they Yorubas, Ashantis, or Akans. Now they were coloreds, niggers, or Negroes (p. 9).

Hale's (1982) quote also provides some basic understanding of the resiliency of African Americans. The family is one of the strongest and most important traditions in African American communities. Although obstacles still abound, the strong tradition of the African American family has survived the slave system, legal segregation, and discrimination (Franklin, 2007; Karenga & Karenga, 2007).

It is important to acknowledge that historically the structure of African American families has not mimicked that of the American standard (i.e., the one unit husband, wife, and children model). The African culture belief of unity helped early slaves create families in a fashion that addressed the harness of slavery (Dodson, 2007; Karenga & Karenga, 2007). As previously stated, the freedom given to slaves to practice religion provided opportunities that built community. These same opportunities allowed slaves to form strong relationships that provided the mutual support necessary to withstand the cruelties of slavery (Franklin, 2007). From these relationships family units were formed that may or may not have been connected by biological ties; still, they were formed out of a mutual understanding and respect for the collective fight for survival. As a result, the early slave communities became an enlargement of the family, with each member having a strong desire to support, love, and encourage the other (Karenga & Karenga, 2007). In



order to survive slavery, early slaves created an extended family model that was complex. During slavery, the slave family included members who were joined by biology and others who were joined out of a common desire to support one another (Nobles, 2007). The black female was at the center of this work and helped to create a tradition of the extended family that is still present in African American communities today (Hine, 2007; McAdoo, 2007). Although early slave owners separated biological families; early, female slaves were able to create a sense of community by mothering those to whom they did not have a biological connection (Hine, 2007). Today, many African American families maintain the complex structure of an extended family, where biological connection is not a prerequisite for family membership. As the cornerstone of the black family, the black female is instrumental to the transference of African heritage and tradition, which help to maintain a sense of unity necessary for the resiliency of a group of people (McAdoo, 2007; Wiggins, 2005).

The black female is instrumental to both her family and her church. Gilkes (2001) and Wiggins (2005), both explain that her independence, self-reliance, strength and autonomy are transferred to and used by both the black family and black church. The literature illustrates how the strength of the black female has been used by the black church to transmit cultural values that teach black families different strategies for coping with societal challenges (McAdoo, 2007). In the literature, the black family is categorized as an institution that has been sustained by major sources of strength, which include: a strong religious orientation, flexibility of family roles, and a strong achievement orientation (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Moss, 2003; Pinn, 2006). According to

McAdoo (2007a), in 2002, 40% percent of African American families were headed by single women. During the same year, roughly 48% of African American families were headed by married couples (Sacramento Observer, 2003)<sup>4</sup>. According to Aird (2002), females are primarily responsible for child rearing. Therefore, the data from McAdoo (2007a) and the Sacramento Observer (2003) reveals that, in their roles as single mother or married mother, women are responsible for the majority of child rearing in 91% of African American families.

Although females are responsible for the majority of child rearing, the role of the black male to his family should not be dismissed. Despite current negative opinion regarding their roles, “black fathers continue to play a role in the nurturing and socialization of their children” and many black fathers are involved in the daily care of their children and tend to be more active as fathers than their forefathers (Livingston & McAdoo, 2007, p. 200). Although many black fathers play an important role in their children’s lives, based on their black church attendance; there are fewer black males to commit themselves to church goals that center on the academic and social needs of African American youth attending public schools. In the section that follows I provide a brief summarization that highlights the intersection of the black church and the black family and how the black female, as a contemporary leader in both the church and family, plays a vital role in the socialization of African American youth.

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<sup>4</sup>According to Burge (2003), the first same sex marriage was not legally recognized until November 18, 2003. Therefore, the statics provided by the Sacramento Observer would refer to male-female marriages.

**The Intersection of the Black Church and Black Family.** As institutions responsible for the socialization of African American youth, black families and black churches have maintained African values and customs that can be celebrated and incorporated in the public school curriculum (Aird, 2002; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Durlak & Weissberg, 2010; Karenga & Karenga, 2007). One of the purposes of this study is to highlight the impact race has on the underachievement of African American students. As stated by Martin and McAdoo (2007):

The transmission of race-related messages to adolescents occurs in numerous settings, such as the family, the schools, the media, and religious institutions. Racial socialization is defined as the transmission of cultural values that teach African American children different strategies to use in negotiating between the broader society and their own communities. (p. 125)

Some scholars assert that one responsibility of black churches is to help parents teach their children about race (Billingsley, 1994; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Martin & McAdoo, 2007). These scholars believe that the black church is a place where some African American parents take their children believing that the church will help their children develop racial identity. Therefore, a part of the socialization of African American youth for school achievement involves addressing the role black churches, as racial socialization agents; play in helping black parents develop a positive racial identity in their children (Martin & McAdoo, 2007).

In African American families and churches, despite the harshness of slavery, segregation, and discrimination black women have played a key role in maintaining the family unit and African culture (Hine, 2007; McAdoo, 2007; Wiggins, 2005). The

literature reveals that black women are instrumental to the transference of African customs and traditions that acknowledge and celebrate strength, independence as well as interdependence, self-reliance and sufficiency, purpose, and autonomy (Gilkes, 2001; Karenga & Karenga, 2007; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Moss, 2003; Peters, 2007; Wiggins, 2005). As stated by Cooper (2007), in their roles as black mothers, black females typically engage in “motherwork” practices to promote the success of African American youth by “(a) ensuring their children’s physical and emotional survival; (b) seeking power to improve their children’s life outcomes and (c) nurturing their children’s positive racial identity” (p. 495). Because of the non-traditional structure of black families, many women within black churches have taken the responsibility to provide services, with goals similar to those stated by Cooper (2007), that aim to empower African American youth for success in their families, homes, churches, and schools (Fine, 2004; Gilkes, 2001; Wiggins, 2005). Therefore, as it relates to this study, as contemporary leaders in their families and churches, black women may prove instrumental in providing prophetic church service that aims to socialize African American youth for public school success.

**Understanding the Impact of Institutional Racism.** Some scholars argue that in African American communities, the black church is a social environment that plays a direct role in socialization (Billingsley, 1994; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Martin & McAdoo, 2007). The black church functions as a racial socialization agent and has some of the necessary resources to provide African American youth with a positive racial (as well as spiritual) identity that will help them better understand how race impacts the

educational opportunities offered to African American students (Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2010; Hale, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Pearson, 1991; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

According to Apple (2004) and supported by Henderson and Verdugo (2002) a possible negative impact of educational policies that over emphasize standardized tests scores is that some educators use race to create concerns regarding the intellectual capacity of students or to question the ability a student's family has to support and nurture academic success. Some scholars argue that when educators use race as a factor that contributes to academic success the black race is often projected as inferior to the white race, and assumptions are made that more exposure to a system structured to advance white students over black students will somehow increase African American student achievement (Fine, 2004; Hale, 2004; Hawley & Nieto, 2010; Sizemore, 2005). The advancement of white students over black students comes from societal values that set white attributes as the norm while ignoring the fact that all students bring cultural values and strengths to their learning experiences (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). When attempts are made to restructure public schools for African American student success the focus is often on how public education should be used to address presumed deficits found within the African American culture (Hillard, 2001). However, as will be discussed further in later sections critical race theorists would argue that the underachievement of African American students cannot be merely attributed to the students; but is caused, in many ways, by systemic racism (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefanić, 2001).

Therefore, educators must ask themselves, “Which ideals of white dominance are manifested and reinforced in our public schools?”

Despite the victories of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, there is a presence of white supremacy that has dominated American culture (Winant, 2004). The dominance of whiteness is evident by the fact that whiteness is often viewed as neutral or the norm (Apple, 2004). Also, according to Fine (2004), there is an everyday privilege to being white, “whiteness grows surrounded by protective pillows of resources and second chances” (p. 243). According to Fine (2004), in American society white is a privilege that ensures protection even if the protection requires the erosion of opportunities for people of color. In our public schools, many education policies are written in a manner that continues the dominance of whiteness as the norm. However, as stated by Rosenberg (2004), “race, especially skin color, has consequences for a person’s status and well-being; blindness to skin color and race remains a privilege available exclusively to White people” (p. 257).

As previously discussed, the Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision voided the previously “separate but equal” ruling, which was used by many states to maintain segregation in public schools. However, 58 years after this historic ruling some would argue that a mistake was made with the ruling as it relates to addressing the assumed superiority of the white race (Sizemore, 2005). Today the question can be asked did the *Brown v. Board* victory do enough to assault white supremacy or did it merely accommodate it? The *Brown v. Board* ruling acknowledged that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal for black students. However, as

Sizemore (2005) suggests, instead of destroying the assertion of white superiority the *Brown v. Board* ruling reinforced it by alluding to the “fact” that “separate but equal” penalized only the black children. However, at the time of the 1954 ruling the African American community had its own all-black colleges, churches, universities, and other organizations. Also, as previously mentioned in the five cases that became the historic *Brown v. Board* case the complaint was never about the quality of the all-black school staffs; but the lack of resources available to them when compared to the resources available to their white counterparts (Burgman, 2011; Sizemore, 2005). Sizemore (2005) argues that the *Brown v. Board* ruling insinuated that anything all-black was inferior and did little to address that segregation was an instrumental part in maintaining white supremacy.

Over 100 years ago, W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), stated that the problem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the problem of the color line. Unfortunately, for African American children, today that analysis is still relevant; the myth of white superiority and black inferiority continues (Sizemore, 2005a). Although some public school educators may find it difficult to discuss issues of white dominance and privilege, it is necessary that public school educators understand both the intentional and unintentional forms of racism that are present in public education (Denbo & Jones, 2002). Additionally, educators must also acknowledge that public schools were structured to maintain white dominance and assumptions of black inferiority. According to Hilliard (2001):

There should be no need to go into detail about the history of education of Africans under slavery, colonization, apartheid, and white supremacy ideology... Massive and strategic attempts were made to use educational structures to destroy critical consciousness, to alienate Africans from tradition and from each other, to teach African inferiority and European superiority (p. 25).

Today, public education continues to promote African inferiority with practices such as, tracking; participation in exceptional children's programs; and course offering, that are implemented based on assumptions that African American children are genetically unable to succeed in public school (Comer, 2002; Hillard, 2001; Parker, 2001). Such views stem from what Powell Pruitt (2004) penned as the "discourse of deficit" in which black students, their families, and communities are viewed as incompetent when compared to white students, their families, and communities – who are often viewed as vessels that are full of potential . When educators use a discourse of deficit they fail to acknowledge that every student has both potential and development needs and that it is the task of the learning institution to recognize both in every student (Powell Pruitt, 2004).

As stated by Denbo and Jones (2002), "Racism has become institutionalized in American schools through hierarchical conceptions of intellectual ability" (p. 3). These hierarchical assumptions promote a system that focuses on the individual and genetic traits of students rather than the ways in which social system organize academic success for some students and academic failure for others. Recognizing and resisting institutional racism is often a priority for those who wish to support the high achievement of African American students. Although, it may not be easy to address issues of racism, it is imperative that resisting institutional racism become an educational goal if we are to bring forth the full potential of African American students to succeed in our public



schools (Denbo & Jones, 2002; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). The American educational system has not been effective in the education of African American children because traditional educational theory/practice focused on molding and shaping African American youth so that they could fit into an educational process designed for white Americans (Hale, 1982). Such practices failed to recognize that black students have distinctive learning styles. In order for schools to work for African American youth a school's culture and structure must be built on a foundation of respect for the diversity that exist in African American culture, as well as a respect for each individual African American students and their families (Ladson-Billings, 2007).

Critical education researchers, Perry et al. (2003), have found that African American students need an education that is culturally relevant and teachers who teach with an understanding that "quality of instruction is the key element in success or failure" (p. 132). Educators should not begin with a search for student deficiencies as to the reasoning behind student failure; but realize that language, culture, race and ethnicity all are key factors that educators can use to improve the achievement of African American students (Lightfoot, 2004; Hawley & Nieto, 2010; Perry et al., 2003). Instead of focusing on assumed deficits found within African American students, educators need to resist institutional racism and examine what cultural practices the school incorporates or excludes that lead to the creation of the underachievement of African American students (Perry et al., 2003). School leaders who lead with an understanding of the importance of recognizing and resisting white-privilege and institutional racism can help public school educators become better equipped to educate minority students (Howard, 2004).

According to Perry et al. (2003), educators must view teaching and learning from the perspective of an African American student and ask:

Why should one focus on learning in school if the learning doesn't, in reality or in one's imaginary community, have the capacity to affect, inform, or alter one's self-perception or one's status as a member of an oppressed group? (p. 11)

Comer and Haynes (1990) also explain that public education has failed to address the special needs of minority students. The foundational structure of the public school system has neglected to incorporate salient features of black culture and the black experience in America (Comer & Haynes, 1990; Edwards et al., 2010). Although, most current forms of educational reform call for higher standards, many methods of reform are lacking a focus on the importance of building relationships with students and acknowledging and celebrating their culture (Comer & Haynes, 1990).

The structure of public schools created a forum for a variety of relationship experiences that have the potential to influence teaching and learning (Aultman, Williams-Johnson, & Schutz, 2009). Of the various relationships that exist in our public school buildings, the student-teacher relationship is one that has the most impact on learner outcomes (California State University at Northridge, n.d.). Although, there are a variety of boundaries and considerations the teacher has to address; educators must acknowledge that student emotions are an integral part of the education process (Aultman, et al., 2009). A positive relationship between the student and the teacher is a reciprocal relationship that is based upon: (1) an understanding of the student's culture and (2) the trust the student has for the teacher's level of concern (California State

University at Northridge, n.d.; Kabbalah and Education, n.d.). When teachers are able to express care and concern toward their students they are able to break through emotional barriers and create a learning environment that fosters the full development of the talent each student uniquely processes (Aultman, et al., 2009; Kabbalah and Education, n.d.). The student-teacher relationship is vital to the success of African American school-aged youth. Although the literature addresses the conditions that foster a positive student-teacher relationship (i.e., understanding of culture and level of concern), in Chapter IV, I discuss how the student-teacher relationship between African American students and public school teachers has been negatively impacted by race. The participants who participated in this study indicated that because of the race of African American students public school educators fail to set high standards for African American students and also fail to show the same level of care to African American students.

## **Part II – Conceptual Framework**

This study was centered on a conceptual framework that draws from the centrality of race and racism in American society, which comes out of critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), social learning theory (Bandura, 1986); and the concept of prophetic activism (McDaniel, 2008; McRoberts, 2003; Swartz, 2008; West, 1982). The centrality of race and racism was used to provide an explanation as to why black churches involve themselves with issues that oppress African American communities. Bandura's (1986) social learning theory was used to detail how black churches can use social interactions as a form of empowerment. Finally, the concept of prophetic activism was used to define black church activism that

extends beyond the walls of the church and addresses the learning needs of all African American youth within the community. Simply stated, the centrality of race and racism answers the “why”, social learning theory answers the “how”, and the concept of prophetic activism details “what it looks like”; with the “it” being black church services and programs implemented to improve the academic performance of African American students attending public schools.

**The Centrality of Race and Racism in American Society.** The first of my research questions is, “Why do black church goers become engaged in the education of African American youth attending public schools?” The literature provides examples - the period of Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s (which includes the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling) - that illustrate how black churches have played a key role in bringing systemic forms of oppression to the attention of mainstream society (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975). The black church is a constant in African American communities that represents stability, independence, and tradition (Gilliam, 1975). Because of racism, which is the systemic domination of whiteness in American society, black churches have had to be places of spiritual development as well as become political institutions that address racial inequality (Pinderhughes, 1992).

Critical race theorists believe that the problem of race is not individual but is systemic and that solutions have to be found in the system/structure (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefanie, 2001; Delanty, 2009; Farr, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race theory involves the following five tenets: (1) counter-storytelling; (2)

the permanence of racism; (3) whiteness as property; (4) interest convergence; and (5) the critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). As it relates to education, counter-storytelling serves as means of including the lived experiences of racialized people who have experienced oppression into the critique of public education (Howard, 2008).

Understanding the permanence of racism means to acknowledge the hierarchical structures that assume the inferiority of minority students. When we look at whiteness as a property we have to confess that, in education, “access to a high-quality, rigorous curriculum, has been almost exclusively enjoyed by White students” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 28). This means that historically the right to possess an education that addresses the learner’s culture and ethnicity has been enjoyed solely by white students. As previously stated, one of the negative impacts of the *Brown vs. Board* decision is that the decision do not do enough to state that the “separate but equal” clause negatively impacted white students as well (Sizemore, 2005). According to critical race theorists, such assumptions highlight how the needs of minority students are usually only addressed by white authorities when to do so does not interfere with the self-interest of the white populations – this is interest convergence. Finally, critical race theorists “are critical of three basic notions that have been embraced by liberal (e.g. market-oriented) legal ideology: the notion of colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and the incremental change” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 29). In education, curriculum written with a colorblind-focus removes the impact race has on the learner. Critical race scholars argue that educators need to be critical of liberalism and understand the unique lived

experiences of their racially diverse students and how those experiences will impact the student's interaction with curriculum and educational systems overall.

For this study, my primary focus is on three tenets of critical race theory. The first being whiteness as property, which will be addressed in my discussion regarding the inability of African American students to obtain an appropriate education because of the color of their skin and how school curriculum is set to a white, middle-classed norm. The second tenet that will be address is the critique of liberalism, which is used to explain the negative impact that concepts, such as colorblindness, has on African American student achievement. For instance, African American students do not experience a colorblind education; they experience an education that has been set to a white norm, which thus marginalizes them (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Sizemore, 2005). Throughout my discussion of these two tenets, I will also use the literature to highlight the link between race, power, and influence; which will address the third and main tenet I will emphasize, being the permanence –and therefore centrality of racism. I am particularly using the centrality of race and racism in American society to provide insight into how black church goers are motivated by racial concerns to provide services and programs that counteract the negative impact race has on the student-teacher relationship between African American students and public educators.

Racial discrimination is the most visible and malicious form of oppression in American society that deeply affects African Americans and shapes their perceptions of America (West, 1982). According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who are attributed with conceptualizing how critical race theory relates to education, inequity in America is

based on three propositions: (1) when compared to class and gender, race is the significant factor in determining inequity; (2) American society is based on property rights; and (3) the intersection of race and property creates a lens through which social inequity can be understood.

As it relates to this study, Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) second and third propositions help to explain how race impacts education. In early America, the United States' Constitution was developed to protect the main objective of capitalism – property. At that time, slaves were viewed as property and were not worthy of the freedoms outlined in the Constitution that protected the rights of property owners. As the scholars state, “From the removal of Indians from the land ... to the construction of Africans as property, the ability to define, possess, and own [obtain] property has been a central feature of power in America” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 52). Therefore, today many African Americans remain disadvantaged because of their race and their ancestors' inability to obtain property (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Understanding the attainment of property provides a justification for black church activism regarding social justice issues centering on race and education.

Education, when viewed as a tool that enables one the ability to successfully navigate American society, can be considered a property right. According to Patterson (2001) after the historic *Brown v. Board* ruling many within the African American community reiterated and shared the white American view of education as the source of advancement in life. For example, black grandmothers and mothers acknowledge the importance of education with statements, such as, “Get an education, boy, ‘cause that’s

the one thing the white man can't take from you" (Patterson, 2001, p. xxiv). Education provides an individual the ability to access their birthright gifts of life, liberty, and justice as outlined in the United States' Constitution (Billings, 1966; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In today's public schools, many African American students are unable to obtain an appropriate education that addresses their race, ethnicity, and the need for proactive African American community involvement (Barton, 2004; Comer, 2002; Comer & Haynes, 1990; Denbo, 2002; Hale, 2004; Hawley & Nieto, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Perry et al., 2003). As a significant institution in African American communities, black churches have a history of political activism and the resources needed to address issues of race (Delanty, 2009; Fine, 2004).

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s provides historical examples of the role black churches played in addressing racial oppression. Racial oppression provides the foundation for the use of critical race theory as a construct that addresses why the black church should concern itself with African American community activism (Farr, 2009). Critical race theory places emphasis on race and views racism as a system that understates the power of the privileged (i.e., white Americans) (California State University, 1999; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delanty, 2009; Delgado & Stefaniec, 2001; Farr, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As it relates to this study, there is an intersection between the centrality of race and racism –stemming from critical race theory– and prophetic activism in that both aim to bring change that will foster social justice (Barnes, 2004; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).



As it relates to this study, the centrality of race and racism in American society will be used to highlight the problem that many African American students experience in today's public schools, which can be attributed to a system that has been designed to ensure infinite advantages for white students while ignoring the needs of African American students (Hale, 2004; Hawley & Nieto, 2010). Additionally, as school leaders begin to look outside the public school building for effective tools for student achievement, the history of black religion reveals that black churches are institutions that have experienced success in restructuring societal thought about race, power, and the attainment of property (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001)

Powers (2007) asserts that critical race theory aims to challenge conventional accounts of education and the social processes that occur within schools. Issues involving education have been among the central topics considered by critical race theorists and have focused on topics ranging from the desegregation of public education to addressing what counts as official knowledge in academic institutions (Powers, 2007). Although, during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s black churches successfully used peaceful protest as a means of addressing racial oppression, critical race theorists believe that traditional civil rights approaches have not fully addressed issues of equality because many civil rights approaches stem from a color-blindness mentality (Powers, 2007). Color blindness is the process of overlooking one's race and ethnic identity; which, as stated by Hawley and Nieto (2010), "Is a good thing when it means that people do not discriminate on the basis of race." (p. 67) However, the concept of color blindness has negative consequences when educators refuse to see (or negate) their students' racial,

ethnic, cultural, linguistic differences, and identities (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). Critical race theorists argue that in today's American society civil right approaches designed solely on the notion of color-blindness and the concept of democracy (e.g., all men are treated equally) ignore the structural inequality of capitalism, which has a focus on the attainment of property (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Powers, 2007). Sizemore (2005) also addressed the issue of a color-blind society when she stated, "White superiority masquerades as color blind when whiteness is the only color it sees" (p. 1).

Critical race theory requires that race be considered a social construct that limits full participation in American society (Farr, 2009). Critical race theorists do not see the problem of race as a cultural problem (i.e., they do not view African Americans or other ethnic minorities through a deficit model); instead, they view race as a problem of social, economic, and political power (Delanty, 2009; Ladner, 2007; Powell Pruitt, 2004).

Although, African American communities are diverse, in America, the racial group of power – namely white Americans – tends to view the efforts of all African Americans through a lens of deviance (Ladner, 2007; Powell Pruitt, 2004). Despite the individual uniqueness that exists in African American communities; as a collective group, African Americans live in a society that assumes white superiority (Holloway & Keppel, 2007; Ladner, 2007; Sizemore, 2005). These deviant views create a system of hegemony that impacts the public school system as well as many African Americans themselves.

Published more than 70 years ago, Woodson's (1933) *The Mis-Education of the Negro* provides the earliest insight into the hegemony found in America's public education system:

The educated Negroes have the attitude of contempt toward their own people because in their own as well in their mixed schools Negroes are taught to admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and Teuton [German] and to despise the African. (p. 1)

As the quote suggests, in America, race is linked to issues of power and influence with laws, educational standards, and other policies based on white-middle class norms (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Hale, 1982; Lewis, 2001; Parker, 2001; Shaffer, Ortman, & Denbo, 2002; Willie, Garibaldi, & Reed, 1991). Critical race theorists understand that those in power have created definitions, assumptions, and procedures that are embedded in hegemonic belief systems and yield hegemonic behavior (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Lewis, 2001). For African American students the cards are stacked against them before they enter for their first day of public schooling. Numerous researchers have found that African American children are educated in a system that was designed to recognize the assumed inferiority black students have to white students (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Howard, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Shaffer et al., 2002; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Therefore, because of their race, black youth attending public schools are subjected to a system that requires each of them to have their worth immediately determined by societal norms that place emphasis on skin color over character, work ethic, and individual ability (Billingsley, 1994; Holloway & Keppel, 2005; Ladner, 2007; Lewis, 2001; Powers, 2007).

As an institution that has a historical significance in African American communities the black church has the community connections needed to more effectively address issues of race (Delanty, 2009; Fine, 2004). Based on critical race theory's

emphasis on the permanence and centrality of race, and the arguments found within historical research, it seems warranted that black church leaders encourage their congregations to see the “two-ness” of African American citizenry. Whether young or old, male or female, rich or poor – in America black people are viewed as black first followed by their other identifying attributes (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Therefore, understanding the “two-ness” of African American citizenry can be used to explain why black church goers become engaged social issues.

**Social Learning Theory.** Many scholars have highlighted the role the black church has played in addressing governmental policy and the literacy efforts of early black churches (see Baldwin, 2003; Beyerlein & Andrews, 2008; Calhoun-Brown, 2003; Dunston, 1989; Fluker, 2003; Howard-Piney, 2003; Gilkes, 2001; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Pinn, 2006; Toldson & Anderson, 2010; Wiggins, 2005). Currently there is little information that speaks specifically to the role the black church has in socializing African American youth for school success. This gap in the literature helped me to form my second research question, “How do black church goers address the social and academic needs of African American school-aged youth in their community and who is responsible for implementing this work?” There is information available in the literature that suggest that black churches have the resources necessary to socialize African American students for school success by offering programs that highlight the importance of social and emotional development as well as cognitive skills and abilities (Martin & McAdoo, 2007; Durlak & Weissberg, 2010; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). According to Martin and McAdoo (2007), black churches have a responsibility to African

American communities to transfer values and cultural beliefs that will enhance the community as a whole unit. This responsibility aligns with concepts found in Bandura's (1986) social learning theory.

Bandura (1986) explains that social learning theory "embraces an interactional model of causation in which environmental events, personal factors, and behavior all operate as interacting determinants of each other" (p. xi). Social learning theory provides a framework for analyzing human motivation, thought, and action from a social cognitive perspective (Bandura, 1986). Social learning theorists address how one obtains the values, beliefs, and actions viewed as appropriate for the system in which they live (Baron et al., 1997). Dereli (2009) states, "people who form children's social environments, including parents, teachers, and friends, play an important role in the acquisition of social skills" (p. 1419). For this study, social learning theory was used to explain how modeling and motivation are used by adult, black church goers to socialize African American youth for school success (Bandura, 1986; Dereli, 2009).

Adults in students' lives can model behaviors that demonstrate prosocial skills, such as cooperation, collaboration, and self-monitoring (Dereli, 2009). Additionally these same adults can provide reinforcements and/or punishments that help students learn to avoid antisocial behaviors, such as physical aggression, oral aggression, and tantrums - which are not accepted in today's public learning institutions (Dereli, 2009). Black churches are built upon Christian values - respect for self and others, honesty, discipline, self-control, duty, hard work, and responsibility - that are aligned with many public school character education programs and thus aligns with behaviors that are accepted in

public schools (Aird, 2002; Durlak & Weissberg, 2010; Karenga & Karenga, 2007).

Therefore, by participating in services offered by black churches, African American youth are able to learn and observe skills that will empower them to succeed in public school (Baron et al., 1997; Barrett, 2010; Dereli, 2009; Turner & Killian, 1993).

Humans have an advanced capacity for observational learning and that observational learning is better suited for expeditious acquisition of competencies and survival skills than is learning solely from a trial-and-error method (Bandura, 1986). Modeling is an important form of observational learning used to diffuse ideas, values, and styles of conduct within a social group (Bandura, 1986). By observing the actions of others, individuals can form rules of behavior, which is transferred into coded information. Coded information produces a set of socially accepted rules, procedures, and expectations that are used to adjust to a variety of life challenges, such as academic success. As will be discussed in Chapter V, developing code information closely aligns to the development of social capital

The development of coded information relates to Martin and McAdoo's (2007) function of the black church as a transmitter of culture and values. According to Cochran (1990), empowerment is a process in which people (e.g., African American youth and their families) learn skills that help them to become better prepared to influence organizations that impact their lives (e.g., public schools). Therefore, through their participation in church service and/or other church sponsored activities African American youth are exposed to behaviors that empower them for public school success. Such exposure helps to eliminate the previously discussed "discourse of deficit" highlighted by

Powell Pruitt (2004). Through the use of modeling and motivation black church goers are able to help African American youth create a “discourse of potential”, which acknowledges the talents and strengths each of them uniquely possesses (Powell Pruitt, 2004). Providing a space for African American youth to see themselves through a lens of potential builds positive self-images and beliefs that form coded information that leads to public school success.

The family and the church are significant social institutions that share responsibility for the dissemination of values that address societal needs (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Cochran, 1990). As a significant social institution black churches share responsibility for providing motivation that will encourage and empower African American students to succeed in school. Motivation is a cognitive modeling mechanism that can be used to produce desired outcomes; there are six identified types of motivators: (1) behavior responses tied into primary instigators involving food, physical contact, or aversive stimuli; (2) behavior responses tied into sensory feedback, such as visual and tactile learning experiences; (3) behavior responses tied into perceived social acceptance and belonging, such as the need for friends and the ability to give and receive love; (4) behavior responses tied into monetary reward; (5) behavior responses tied into physiological needs, which are those basic needs required to sustain life; and (6) behavior responses tied into perceived power and status change, such as self-respect, achievement, and reputation (Bandura, 1986).

Since churches share responsibility for the transmission of culture, in this study social learning theory was used to explore the extent to which black church goers use

modeling, motivation, and other social learning techniques to empower African American students and their families to improve the learning conditions of African American youth attending public schools. With an understanding that social learning theory addresses how one obtains values, beliefs, and appropriate behaviors this study examined if the actions of black church goers empowers African American youth to overcome obstacles, such as structural differentiations by race (Bandura, 1986; Baron, et.al, 1997; Billings, 1966; Cochran, 1990; Noguera, 2001). Social learning theory provides the foundational skills black church goers can use to become prophetic in their service to African American youth attending public schools. Such prophetic service will need to be done through the modeling of appropriate societal behavior and the use of motivators that encourage student success (Bandura, 1986; Price, 2008).

When black churches are able to aggressively mobilize they are able to transmit pro-social and pro-achievement values that counteract student negativity and school disengagement. The underachievement of African American students can be, in part, attributed to the negative impact race has on the student-teacher relationship as well as the public school's failure to structure a curriculum that acknowledges the race and ethnicity of African American students (Barton, 2004; Comer, 2002; Comer & Haynes, 1990; Denbo, 2002; Hale, 2004; Hawley & Nieto, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Perry et.al, 2003; Price, 2008). Social learning theory provides a general lens that frames the actions of the black church goers who participated in this study. Whereas, the next component of my conceptual framework, prophetic activism, was used to provide possible examples of how modeling and motivation can look like when acted out by



adult, black church goes through their service to their churches and African American youth.

**Prophetic Activism.** Faith-based activism is a growing form of civic engagement. Black churches have served their communities in a way that combines an emphasis on spiritual development with active participation in worldly affairs (Baldwin, 2003; Swarts, 2008). Baldwin (2003) explains:

The general contention is that there has always been a tradition in the black church that encourages faith-based social action, social service, and involvement in public policy issues. This tradition is rooted in a social gospel that upholds Christianity's historic concern for the poor and oppressed and that encourages the involvement of the church in virtually every aspect of African American life (p. 15).

Many African Americans attending black churches have a common understanding of the Christian faith and its implications for addressing both human need and inequality. These individuals have historically used their service to their church as a means of challenging the status quo of a racial hegemonic society (Baldwin, 2003; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Calhoun-Brown, 2003).

The use of places of worship in addressing social problems is both a cultural and structural strategy (Swarts, 2008). Faith-based activism is a structural strategy in terms of the use of available resources and social networks that exist within the place of worship (Swarts, 2008; McDaniel, 2008). Faith-based activism is a cultural strategy that utilizes the authority and legitimacy of the faith-based institution; the influence of the faith-based institution in family life; and the faith-based institution's role as the primary domain of rituals, symbols, and values (Swarts, 2008). The mobilization of places of worship has

created a unique cultural experience in American social movements (Swarts, 2008).

Historically, black church leaders and members of black churches have acted on a belief that religion and morality should play some role in democratic politics and law making, despite the constitutional boundaries between church and state (Baldwin, 2003).

As previously stated, McRoberts (2003) asserts that black church activism refers to “very extroverted forms of religious presence – forms that somehow benefit not only congregation members but people who do not belong to the church” (p. 100). According to McDaniel (2008), a black church becomes politically active when four conditions are met: (1) the church leader is interested in involving the church in community issues; (2) the church itself is not restricted from having a presence in community matters (i.e., church by-laws); (3) the church members are receptive to the idea of having the church involved in community concerns; and (4) the current social climate both necessitates and allows church involvement.

Addressing black church activism is one of the legacies of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Gaines, 2010; African American Odyssey, n.d.; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Savage, 2008). During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, black churches transmitted a powerful message about the ability and necessity of religious institutions to become involve in social change. According to Barnes (2004), most scholars of black religion place black church activism into two distinct categories: priestly and prophetic. When these two distinct categories are used, priestly black churches are categorized by their singular focus on the spiritual life of church members (Barnes, 2004; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Prophetic black churches, on the other hand,

are described by their ability to collectively lead economic and political change as well as maintain the culture and ethnic identity of African Americans (Barnes, 2004; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

For the purposes of this study, I decided to use McRoberts (2003) descriptions of black church activism. I felt that McRoberts descriptions more accurately outline the levels of church involvement that relate to the services and programs offered to black, youth church goers and their academic needs. McRoberts (2003) outlined three levels of church activism that detail how church membership and church attendance impacts the church's involvement in social issues, such as the underachievement of African American school-aged youth. McRoberts' (2003) three levels of black church activism are: (1) priestly activism; (2) pastoral activism; and (3) prophetic activism. Black churches that are priestly-centered focus all of their energy and resources on the exclusive service to church members (i.e., church membership is a prerequisite for all services and programs offered by the church). Pastorally-active black churches serve a mixture of both non-church members and church members (i.e., church membership is not required; however, in order to be informed of the service or program church attendance is required). As with other scholars, such as Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), McRoberts (2003) agrees that the highest level of black church activism is prophetic service that focuses on service to non-members and the betterment of the whole community (i.e., neither church membership nor church attendance determines the beneficiary of the church service or program). Using McRoberts (2003) descriptions of black church activism will help educators understand how a black youth's church affiliation, as well as black church goers

understanding of social justice, impacts the level of church advocacy available to such youth.

As previously illustrated in the literature review, the actions of black churches during the period of Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s were truly prophetic, in that the services provided by black churches, during these periods of time, were intended to improve the social conditions of all members of the community, not just church members or attendees. As Calhoun-Brown (2003) states:

The historic importance of black churches to the survival and liberation of individuals in an enslaved and segregated American society, and their importance to the interaction of individuals through the Great Migration, the civil rights movement, and electoral political efforts, should not be understated. As the primary institution in civil society they [black churches] helped perform the functions most often associated with institutions of civil society, including helping individuals to define community, understand norms, learn social trust, and develop civic skills and values. (p. 39)

Indeed, according to Howard-Pitney (2003), one of the relevant features of black religion is the ability that black religion has to take on prophetic services. Historically, the prophetic service offered by black churches has served to energetically protest social injustices (e.g., Jim Crow, education) and provided the ideological tenets and rhetorical weapons that encourage social change (Howard-Pitney, 2003). Today, black churches have the potential to come together to address current civic issues facing African Americans, such as the underachievement of African American students attending public schools (Howard-Pitney, 2003).

In his book, *Mobilizing the Community to Help Students Succeed*, Price (2008) identifies three key areas that the black church can address in an effort to become

prophetic activist as it relates to the education of African American students attending public schools. These three areas are: (1) boosting student motivation; (2) celebrating student achievement; and (3) promoting academic success. These three areas relate to Bandura's (1986) social learning theory and provide insight into my third research question, which is, "How can the academic support efforts of black churches inform education leaders in developing school partnerships with black churches"? School leaders who read this study will be informed of the extrinsic motivation black churches offer to African American students in their efforts to improve African American student achievement.

Some of the suggestions outlined by Price (2008) also align with Bandura's (1986) six types of motivators. For example, when providing services that aim to boost black students' motivation (i.e., their self-desire to succeed in school), the literature suggests that black churches need to create an atmosphere that values African American youth and displays acceptance and belonging (Price, 2008; Bandura, 1986). This could be done through service and/or programs such as: mentoring programs, positive encouragement; celebrating cultural strengths; valuing individuals by affirming their potential; and providing ceremonies and rites of passages (Price, 2008).

Price (2008) further notes that in addition to providing an environment that builds upon a student's own potential to succeed, black churches offer services that directly celebrate student achievement. He notes that examples of such services/programs include: creating a church climate that focuses on the academic achievement of students as well as their spiritual development; having protected time on the church's calendar for

programs that are designed to inform parents and students of local school system policies and practices; using church resources (e.g. members) to conduct career and/or achievement fairs that highlight the importance of education in both social and spiritual development; conducting community parades in which church members visit surrounding neighborhoods to inform community members of the services the church provides; holding recognition luncheons, receptions, or programs that honor academic achievement; and, in addition to academic recognition programs, provide recognition to those students who display behavior that aligns with the expectations of Christian ethics. These types of activities also align with Bandura's (1986) six types of motivation in that they can address motivation that is tied into our physical needs (e.g., providing food at a recognition program); our social need for acceptance and belonging (e.g., taking the time to connect with youth, church goers); and our social need for power and acceptance (e.g., recognizing student achievement). Social learning theory and critical race theory in conjunction with examples provided by Price (2008) add to the conceptual framework for black church activism. Price (2008) has provided examples that illustrate prophetic church activism. Therefore, as I conducted my study, I tried to observe the programs and services the selected black churches offered and compared their programs/services to his examples. I also noted services provided by the selected black churches that were not mentioned by the scholar. The black church shares responsibility for the transmission of cultural values that teach black families different strategies for coping with societal challenges (Martin & McAdoo, 2007). As I conducted my study, I tried to determine if

the selected black churches were using the strategies described by Bandura (1986) to create a culture that inspires academic success.

Finally, in America, race has a determining factor in the acquisition of property. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), education can be viewed as property. Programs that aim to address student achievement may also need to address race and the impact race has on a student's ability to obtain an appropriate education. As an institution responsible for the racial socialization of African American youth, black churches maintain African values and customs that have the potential to provide African American youth with a positive racial identity, which will empower them to succeed in today's public schools (Aird, 2002; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Durlak & Weissberg, 2010; Karenga & Karenga, 2007; Martin & McAdoo, 2007).

### **Chapter Conclusion**

The black church has played a significant role in addressing systems of racial oppression. This institution has provided support that has helped African Americans withstand and overcome various forms of social discrimination. Although the senior pastor may serve as the formal leader of the church, contemporary views of black church leadership must acknowledge that all black church goers, especially women, are instrumental to successful black church activism. Black women have been vital to the resiliency of the black church. In addition to the significant role they play in the black church, black women have played a vital role in the survival of the black family. Black women, therefore, will have a critical role in any efforts aimed to forge church-home partnerships.

The conceptual framework that will guide this study was created to provide a context in which the negative impact race has on the student-teacher relationship could be examined as well as illustrate how the black church provides opportunities for positive social interaction to address the declining student-teacher relationship. As will be discussed in later chapters, the centrality of race and racism in society addresses institutional racism and provides a conceptual grounding for the first of my three research questions. Social learning theory explains the benefits of building African American student capacity for academic success in a social environment, such as the black church, and provides the conceptual foundation for the second of my three research questions. Finally, prophetic activism describes church activism that extends beyond the walls of the church to benefit all members of African American communities and provides the conceptual footing for the third, and final, research question. In the chapter that follows I will detail the steps I took to execute this study in a manner that addressed the importance of the conceptual framework.



### **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study used a collective case study research design method. A case study involves the use of a system that is bounded by time, event, and/or place to explore a phenomenon in order to illustrate a problem or its solutions (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 1994). In a collective case study, the focus is on studying more than one bounded system with the intent of understanding a phenomenon through multiple lenses (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). The use of a collective case study allows for comparison and provides a diversified view of the problem or solutions (Casey & Houghton, 2010). As it relates to this study, the collective case research design was used to examine the prevalence of prophetic services offered to African American youth (and their families) by the two selected black churches in an effort to address the current underachievement of African American youth attending public schools.

Casey and Houghton (2010) state that a case study is an appropriate design approach when “how” or “why” questions are being studied. Again, the three research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) Why do black church goers become engaged in the education of African American youth attending public schools?

- 2) How do black church goers address the social and academic needs of African American school-aged youth in their community and who is responsible for implementing this work?
- 3) How can the academic support efforts of black churches inform education leaders in developing school partnerships with black churches?

Using a collective case study research design method allows the researcher to focus on such questions while taking the context of the situation into account by focusing on real world application and practice (Casey & Houghton, 2010).

### **Sampling and Data Collection**

For this study, purposeful sampling was used. Creswell (2007) states:

The concept of purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research. This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (p. 125).

The use of purposeful sampling allowed me to seek and select two churches that could provide insight into the prevalence of prophetic activism. Additionally, it was important that I identified and selected two churches that had black church goers who would be willing to participate in the study. In qualitative research, the data collected from study participants is gathered through interview, observation, document review, and audio visual materials. The quality of the data collected is greatly impacted by the sample; therefore, the use of purposeful sampling was a vital component to this study.

**Sampling.** I purposefully selected to explore the nature of prophetic services offered by two black churches with reputations of being involved with the local school

district. Both churches are located within the city limits of the school district. The first church, Worship Baptist Church<sup>5</sup>, has approximately 5,000 members on record and is located in the southeast region of the selected North Carolina county. Worship Baptist Church is a mega-church. According to the Hartford Institute for Religion Research (n.d.), the term mega-church is used to describe any Protestant congregation with a sustained church membership of at least 2000 members. The neighborhood that immediately surrounds Worship Baptist Church is an established African American community that consists of single-family home dwellings. Many of the homes are rental properties and Worship Baptist Church has established a community watch program with the members of the community. The second church, Gospel Baptist Church<sup>4</sup>, has approximately 400 members on record and is located in the central region of the North Carolina county in which it is located. Due to the recent road construction, Gospel Baptist Church is no longer surrounded by an immediate neighborhood. Gospel Baptist Church is now located on a main city fairway that consists of some single-dwelling homes and a shopping center. The homes are occupied by African American, Caucasian, and Latino residents.

Although part of the focus of my study was to explore the prevalence of prophetic activism, the selection of these two black churches was considered a maximum variation sampling because the distinct difference in church size also allowed me to examine if church size impacts prophetic activism. As previously noted, both churches had reputations of being involved with the local school district. Worship Baptist Church

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<sup>5</sup> To maintain the anonymity of study participants pseudonyms are being used for the two churches that participated in this study.

offered services to a high school that is located within close proximity to the church. Gospel Baptist Church operated a program that was available to all students enrolled in the school district. The program provided by Gospel Baptist Church provides educational services to students, mostly African Americans, who have been suspended long-term from the school district.

After receiving approval from my doctoral committee, I contacted the senior pastor of each church to schedule a time to meet with them to discuss my study. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information about the significance of my study and to obtain their permission to conduct the study in their respective churches. After obtaining permission from the senior pastors, I submitted my research application to the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). After obtaining IRB approval, purposeful sampling was used to select participants to share their stories. Information contained in the literature was used to purposefully select interviewees for the individual interviews. For example, the literature highlighted the importance to the church leader (*see* Gilkes, 2001; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; McDaniel, 2008; McRoberts, 2003; Savage, 2008; Swartz, 2008; Wiggins, 2005). Therefore, the senior pastor of each church was interviewed. The literature also highlighted how important church goers, particularly women, are to the black church. Through observations, document review, and interviews I identified and interviewed four women from Gospel Baptist Church and two women from Worship Baptist Church who were instrumental to the services and programs offered to African American youth (Calhoun-Brown, 2003; Gilkes, 2001; Higginbotham, 1993; Wiggins, 2005). Other church members or church leaders who were identified

through observation, document review, interview, or by their title (i.e., Youth Pastor) as having a key role in the services offered to African American youth were also interviewed.

**Data Collection.** According to Yin (1994), the use of multiple data collection methods provides a more convincing and accurate case study. Creswell (2007) has identified four basic types of qualitative data collection processes: observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials. Observation data can include both participant and non-participant observations that allow the researcher to identify what is happening as it relates to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007; Jorgensen, 1989). Interviews can range from close-ended to open-ended and provide an opportunity for the voices of study participants to be heard while allowing the researcher to interpret the significance of the phenomenon through the participant's point-of-view (Creswell, 2007). Documentary evidence can include official memos, minutes, and/or records that establish the underlying commitment of an organization to the phenomenon being studied (Casey & Houghton, 2010; Creswell, 2007). Audiovisual data collection includes activities such as examining photographs, videos, and other personal possessions of study participants (Creswell, 2007). For this study three methods of qualitative data collection were used: observation, interviews, and the review of documents. Due to the personal nature of audiovisual materials and the requirement the researcher had to store all data collected for a set period of time, these items were not collected as part of this study.

**Observation.** Creswell (2007) states, "Observing in a setting is a special skill that requires addressing issues such as the potential deception of the people being observed,

impression management, and the potential marginality of the researcher in a strange setting” (p. 134). For this study, observation was a crucial data collection process that allowed me to build an in-depth picture of the selected black churches. The use of observation challenged me to always be mindful of my role (i.e., participant, non-participant, or middle-ground position) in the data collection process. Additionally, the mechanics of observation presented a challenge for me as the researcher. When I observed in the participant role I had to be mindful of the need to record data and avoid over participation in the service. However, according to Creswell (2007) such challenges are a normal part of qualitative research and require the researcher to always be mindful of the need to collect data that reflects the system being studied versus any researcher’s biases. Therefore, to ensure that my observations accurately recorded the events being observed, I created and used an observation protocol that was approved by my dissertation committee (see Appendix A).

The protocol was designed to capture key data (e.g., date and type of event, physical conditions) and served as a tool to ensure that data was being captured on a set interval (i.e., every ten minutes) (Jorgensen, 1989). As a part of this study 13.5 hours of observation data was collected. I observed two worship services and a youth event at Gospel Baptist Church. I also observed two worship services, a meeting of adult youth leaders, and a parent meeting at Worship Baptist Church. Going into the study I had anticipated having the opportunity to observe the two programs, the anti-suspension program and mentoring program, that initially peaked my interest with these two churches. However, changes at both churches prevented me from observing these

programs. Due to a change in youth leadership at Worship Baptist Church, the mentoring program the church sponsored with a local high school had been temporary suspended. The anti-suspension program at Gospel Baptist Church was not running during the months in which this study was conducted due to limited funding.

**Interviews.** Like observations, the challenges with interviewing often focus on the mechanics of conducting an interview. According to Creswell (2007), the mechanical challenges with interviews involve the researcher's ability to negotiate questions, deal with sensitive issues, and complete transcriptions. Additionally, Suonine and Jokinen (2005) explain that the researcher must be aware that how questions are phrased may lead to subtle persuasive questions, response, or explanations. This means that as the researcher I had to develop questions that gave me insight into the nature of prophetic activism without leading or guiding participants to provide an answer that removed objectivity. As with the observation conducted for this study, the use of an approved interview protocol allowed me to take field notes during the interview sessions and served to organize my thoughts and reminded me of key interview components, such as ending the interview and thanking the participant for their involvement in the study (Creswell, 2007). I used individual interviews and focus-groups to hear the voices of black church goers and to obtain their insight into the prevalence of prophetic activism.

The interview protocol (see Appendix B) was approved by my dissertation committee and contained 17 questions. Four questions were created to establish rapport and increase the participant's comfort level before addressing questions that were directly related to my conceptual framework. Two questions addressed critical race theory and

were created in an effort to take into account the participant's view regarding the impact race has on education and the services offered by black churches. Three questions addressed social learning theory and were created to gain evidence as to the types of actions/activities conducted by black church goers in their efforts to address the social and academic needs of African American youth. There were two questions that addressed prophetic activism and were created to gain insight as to how the church reaches the community at large. I created another question that addressed prophetic activism. This question was created not only to gain insight as to how the church extended services beyond the walls of the church; but also to gain insight as to who was responsible for the services offered by the church. One additional question was asked to gain insight into how the black church supports black families in their efforts to develop a positive racial identity in African American youth. Finally, there were four questions that help me identify examples of prophetic activism that were not addressed in my review of the literature. Overall, I conducted nine individual interviews for a total of 8.25 hours of individual interview data.

In qualitative research, it is important for a researcher to acknowledge the information he/she brings with them into the study (Creswell, 2007). For example, based on my review of the literature, I anticipated that replies to some of the interview questions would highlight the modeling, motivation, and other social learning reinforcements offered by the adults as a means of creating coded information that empowered the students for school success (Bandura, 1986). As will be discussed in the Chapter V, I discovered ties to social learning theory; however, the coded information



provided to youth black church goers by adult black church goers is done in a manner that produces a hidden agenda and not so much of a blatant message regarding the importance of high achievement. Due to the extensive literature review conducted prior to the study and my role as a black female, I went into the study anticipating that responses to the question regarding “Who does the work”, would focus on the significance of black females (Gilkes, 2001; Higginbotham, 1993, and Wiggins, 2005). As will be revealed in Chapter V, I indeed discovered that women were primarily responsible for a majority of church volunteerism; however, during data analysis I revisited Gilkes (2001), Higginbotham (1993), and Wiggins (2005) and other scholars’ work to seek additional clarification as to why some black women, including myself, seemed content to leave church leadership to their male counterparts.

The approved protocol used for the individual interviews served as a guide to the questions that were presented at the focus-group sessions. The use of focus-groups was beneficial to this case study design since the use of the focus-groups allowed me to hear the voices of more people at one time. In addition:

Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, when time to collect information is limited, and when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1988; Stewart & Shandasani, 1990 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 133).

I conducted three focus-groups. Two focus groups were conducted at Gospel Baptist Church—one focus-group for parents of African American youth and one focus-group for African American youth. Fifteen parents were present at the Gospel Baptist Church

parent focus-group all of whom had school-aged children; however, not all children represented were enrolled in public schools (there were two home-school families present at this meeting). Twelve youth were present at the Gospel Baptist Church African American, youth focus-group; however, not all youth were enrolled in public school (three youth were home-schooled by their mothers). One youth focus-group was conducted at Worship Baptist Church, in which participation was open to youth ages 11 – 18; however, the focus-group was only attended by an all-female audience ranging in age from 11 – 15. It should be noted that five attempts were made to schedule the parent-focus group at Worship Baptist Church; however, conflicts in the church's schedule prevented me from conducting the parent focus-group at this church. Although I was unable to conduct a parent focus-group specifically designed for my study, I was able to participate in and observe a parent meeting held by the church that was organized to discuss home-church and home-school communication. I had anticipated being able to collect approximately six hours of focus-group data; yet, due to church facility and participant availability, I collected an additional 3.5 hours of data through the use of focus-groups (11.75 hours in total interview data). Due to the time and facility restraints of the focus-groups, not all questions asked during the individual interviews were asked of focus-group participants. However, key questions were asked during the focus-group sessions that helped me to determine: 1) the nature and level of prophetic activism as it relates to educational services and programs provided by black churches; 2) what factor race has on the academic services and perceived abilities of African American youth attending public schools; and, 3) participants' views regarding the allocation of church

resources. Follow-up questions were asked during the focus groups that allowed me to clarify participant statements.

***Document Review.*** In addition to observation and interviews, I reviewed church documents as a part of the data collection process. The primary challenge faced by researchers who use this form of data collection involves the process of locating relevant artifacts (Creswell, 2007). Yet, Casey and Houghton (2010), state that the review of documents is necessary to help the researcher establish an institution's commitment to a phenomenon that may not be easily observed or shared through interview. Through the use of computer technology, I was able to search each church's website for documents related to church history, youth ministry, and church events. Although, the use of technology did assist me in my review of documents it was challenging to find historical documents that spoke to the nature of prophetic activism as it related to African American student achievement. In all, I spent five hours reviewing and collecting relevant church documents, which included: church bulletins from both churches, church calendars for both churches, memos/agendas from meetings focusing on the needs of school-aged children (Worship Baptist Church), youth and parent newsletters (Worship Baptist Church), and pictures from previously held youth events (Gospel Baptist Church).

Although, a document protocol was not identified as being a necessary part of the data collection process; I used an approved protocol (see Appendix C) to ensure that each document I reviewed was being studied objectively for evidence that highlights the church's commitment to prophetic services that centers on the academic achievement of African American youth attending public schools. The protocol, which consisted of eight

considerations, was developed and approved by my dissertation committee to help me view each document through my conceptual framework. There were five considerations that addressed the need to review the documents/artifacts through a lens that focused on the church's commitment to offer services/programs to the community at large (i.e., prophetic activism). Two considerations spoke to the need to review documents/artifacts through a lens that focuses on the actual actions of the adults (i.e., social learning theory). There was some overlap with two of the considerations in that the both spoke to the need to view documents/artifacts through a lens that focuses on the construct of race (i.e., critical race theory). Table 2 and provide a summary of the data collected as a part of this study. The table provides the pseudonym for the participants who were involved in individual interviews and also provides a summary of the number of hours devoted to each form of data collection.

**Table 2**

**List of Data Collection Process & Individual Interview Participants**

<b>Type of Data Collection</b>	<b>Church Location</b>	<b>Number of Hours</b>
Individual Interview	Gospel Baptist Church	4.25
Individual Interview	Worship Baptist Church	4
Focus-Group	Gospel Baptist Church	2.5
Focus-Group	Worship Baptist Church	1
Observation	Gospel Baptist Church	6
Observation	Worship Baptist Church	7.5
Document Review	Gospel Baptist Church	2.5
Document Review	Worship Baptist Church	2.5
	<b>Total Data Collection Time:</b>	<b>30.25</b>

**Table 2 Continued:**

<b>Participant (Pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Church Affiliation (Pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Church Role</b>
Kerry (female)	Gospel Baptist Church	Youth Director
Sally (female)	Gospel Baptist Church	Former Youth Director
Bernice (female)	Gospel Baptist Church	Youth Choir Advisor
Mae (female)	Gospel Baptist Church	Dance Ministry Advisor
Pastor Clarence (male)	Gospel Baptist Church	Senior Pastor
Pastor Albert (male)	Worship Baptist Church	Youth Pastor
Pastor Daniel (male)	Worship Baptist Church	Senior Pastor
Alicia (female)	Worship Baptist Church	Youth Advisor
Tracy (female)	Worship Baptist Church	Youth Volunteer

As noted in Table 2, and previously explained, pseudonyms were only used for those who participated in an individual interview. As a sign of respect to their position within their respective churches, I used the title, Pastor, with those who served in that capacity. However, fictitious first names were used for all other individual interview participants. Using only a fictitious first name reflects the level of rapport and comfort I was able to establish with the study participants. During the initial contact and pre-interview meeting, each of the participants asked that I refer to them by their first name.

It should also be noted, that names were not collected during the focus groups. This was done to maintain anonymity and to align with procedures documented within the approved IRB application. Therefore, in Chapters IV through VI, focus-group participants will not be referred to by a fictitious name. During the transcription process, when there seemed to be a conversation between two or more participants I did use numbers (i.e., parent 1, parent 2, etc.) to note the speaker. However, the use of such descriptors was only used for questions that generated a lot dialogue and not to

consistently identify a particular speaker. In other words, the focus-group sessions were transcribed in a manner to primarily identify gender and church affiliation. Focusing on these two descriptors helped me to determine how themes developed across genders and/or church lines. As previously discussed, a key component of this study was to examine who was responsible for the majority of church volunteerism and to gain insight into the impact church size has on the prevalence of prophetic activism. Identifying focus-group participants individually by name did not have an impact of those two themes.

### **Data Analysis, Ethical Considerations, and Researcher's Subjectivity**

The purpose of this qualitative collective study was to examine how the concept of prophetic activism presents itself in black churches that aim to socialize African American youth for school success. As the researcher of this study I used observations, interviews (including the use of focus-groups), and document review to examine how two identified black churches were prophetic in the services and programs offered to African American youth (and their families) in an effort to prepare African American students for public school success. Additionally, this study explored what impact the contemporary leadership of black females had on prophetic activism.

**Data Analysis.** In qualitative research the analysis of data consists of preparing and organizing the data, reducing the data into themes, and representing the data in tables or discussion (Creswell, 2007). As the researcher I had to be aware that the data generated by qualitative methods are voluminous and I had to have a plan in place that helped organize the data that was collected. Wolcott (1994) explained that in case studies,

the researcher takes the raw data from observations, interviews, and document review to identify patterned regularities which can be linked to the literature through the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework was used to maintain the cohesiveness of the study; therefore, all data was organized and analyzed with the conceptual framework in mind.

Creswell (2007) has identified data managing as an important step in the data analysis process. Data managing involves creating files to organize the data. For each observation conducted, my initial observation and reactions were recorded in field notes using the observational protocol. Following the observation, I took time to reflect on the event and wrote additional notes that spoke to the conceptual framework created for this study or the presence of events that did not align to the conceptual framework. During each interview a digital audio recorder was used to capture all information shared during the interview. After each interview, I transcribed the interview to create a written record of the interview. For the focus-groups, I also made a digital audio recording of each meeting. I immediately transcribed the recording in effort retain memory of the participants (i.e., their gender, their mannerisms when they responded, their location in the room). I made copies or took an extra copy of all documents I reviewed as a part of this study. On the researcher's copy of each document I used the approved document protocol to write notes on the document that addressed the eight considerations previously mentioned. In order to fulfill my obligation to the university's IRB process, I will maintain all field notes and transcriptions for three years following the approval of this dissertation.

After the data was compiled into a format that could be easily maneuvered, I read through the text and made notes to document my initial reflection and formed initial coding (Creswell, 2007). Following initial coding, I developed themes and began to form interpretations based on research assumptions formed by perspectives contained in the literature (Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 1994). In argument with Creswell (2007) and Wolcott (1994), who state that in qualitative research triangulation is used to corroborate the data generated from the research study; as it relates to this study I analyzed the transcriptions and field notes specifically looking for themes that centered on 1) black church goers' understanding of race and the impact race has on educational services; 2) the use of social learning theory practices, such as modeling and motivation that transfer values that empower African American youth for school success; and 3) church programs that were extended to both youth church attendees and youth who did not regular attend church service. However, in argument with Creswell (2007) who stated that themes that do not align to selected theories also reveals possible solutions to the identified problem; I made sure that I was open to additional themes that emerged from my study that were not tied to the selected conceptual framework. As will be discussed, in Chapter IV, one of the most surprising themes that emerged from my data was a possible shift in black churches from a black agenda.

As the researcher, I must acknowledge that the analysis of data serves to inform me and the reader of the lessons learned from this study. In later chapters, the lessons learned from this study will be generalized in a manner that highlights connectivity to the conceptual framework. These generalizations can be used by both black church leaders



and school leaders in efforts to forge school-church partnerships. The hallmark of a good qualitative study is the ability to represent the data in the form of charts, tables, or other visuals that help the reader understand the cohesiveness of themes to the identified conceptual framework (Creswell, 2007; Wolcott, 1994). Therefore, in Chapter VI, Figure 1.0 provides a visual representation of the conceptual framework that can be used by future church and school leaders in their efforts to forge school-church partnerships. Additionally, Table 3, Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6 provide a visual representation of the services and programs currently offered, or that could be potentially offered, by black churches as well as highlight the current, or potential, level of activism as defined by McRoberts (2003) and the significant role black women play in the implementation of the services or programs offered by black churches.

**Ethical Considerations.** Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (p. 3). With such a daunting task, qualitative researchers must adhere to ethical standards that maintain the validity of the study and protect study participants. Lipson (1994) explains there are five ethical categories each qualitative researcher must address: informed consent procedures; deception or covert activities; confidentiality toward participants, sponsors, and colleagues; benefits verses the risks of the study to participants; and requests that go beyond social norms.

The IRB application highlighted the steps I took to ensure that: (1) informed consent was obtained for all interviews (including focus-group participation); (2) the

confidentiality of the two selected churches and all study participants was maintained; (3) all participation risk was clearly listed in the informed consent document; and (4) that my actions and those of my participants adhered to local, state, and/or federal laws as well as any church related values and expectations. I also provided each individual interviewee participant the opportunity to read, reflect, and clarify the transcriptions. This process could not be done with focus-group participants because, although informed consent was obtained, identifiable information (i.e., name) was not included in my data collection process. Providing an opportunity for the individual interview study participants to review the findings of my research ensures that the study provides a composite picture rather than an individual (person or church) perspective (Creswell, 2007). As stated by Creswell (2007) the researcher is responsible for determining what data will become a part of the study and what data will be filtered and/or removed. Therefore, in qualitative research, the researcher's subjectivity must be addressed. The subjectivity I bring to this study is highlighted in the section that follows.

**Role of the Researcher.** I am an African American public school educator in an urban school system located in central North Carolina. The school district in which I work is located in the same county as the two churches selected for this study. I have been employed with the same school system for 20 years. During my tenure I have served as a middle school math and science teacher, a school counselor, and currently serve as a program specialist overseeing the successful implementation of state testing procedures. In addition to my role as an educator, my roles as a mother, female and black church member have strongly influenced my desire to explore the collaborative relationship that

*should* exists between public schools and black churches and the potential for strengthening that link. I place emphasis on the word, “should”, because I entered this study with a belief that the black church has been too silent on the current status of African American youth attending public schools.

Riessman (1993) states that, “The construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it.” (p. v). Indeed, my desire to investigate ways in which school leaders can collaborate with black churches comes from deep within me. I agree with Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) that the church, the family, and the school are the three most critical, social institutions in American society. For me, the black church is in a position to serve as a bridge between home and school. From my perspective, in today’s economy we are asking schools to do more with less and yet we are not providing information to our school leaders on how to build collaborative, free connections with members of the community who have resources that can help educators prepare students for school and life success. In addition, I feel that many black churches have moved away from the prophetic services as outlined by McDaniel (2008) and McRoberts (2003) that aim to empower all members of African American communities, specifically, African American youth enrolled in public schools.

It is important for me to acknowledge and disclose my positionality from the outset of this study. In my position of African American mother, I have a strong desire to provide the best I can for my children and to look for opportunities to improve the educational and social programs available to them. As a mother, I understand that there will be other adults, such as teachers, extended family members and friends, who will be

a part of their village and exposed them to opportunities that will enhance their nature talents and abilities. As a Christian mother, I believe that members of my church-family should be a part of that village and share with me in my parenting journey as well.

In my position of public school educator, I have a strong belief that all children deserve the best education and that teaching and learning can and does occur outside the walls of the public school building. When I served in the capacity of school counselor, I was often afforded the opportunity to speak with parents on issues regarding parenting techniques and providing optimum education outcomes. I vividly remember an incident where I had to speak to a mother regarding her child's behavior and lack of self-motivation. The young boy had been referred to the office and had received several school suspensions for behaviors such as: leaving class without permission, destroying school property, and physical aggression towards other students. When I spoke to this mother, in my role as a school counselor, she was very suspicious because of her own negative experiences with public schools when she was a child. However, one Sunday, at church, I ran into this mother, who was then visiting my church; seeing me as a black church member change the mother's perspective of me and helped me to build rapport with her in an effort to help her son. It was at that moment I reflected upon my own childhood church memories and pondered the notion of the church serving as a bridge between the school and home. I remembered thinking to myself of the power that can be found in the potential programs and services offered by black churches that help parents to better maneuver the public school system; help students establish and work towards

spiritual, social and academic goals, and provide mentors who could help children reach those goals.

In my position of black church member, I believe that we are not only called to care about the spirit of a person; but to ensure that we, as church members, are providing programs and services that help people in their everyday lives. For me, this means providing programs and services as well advocating that our African American youth excel in our public schools. In my position of black, female church member, I believe that although in many black churches, as the case with my own black church, men hold the positions of leadership (i.e., senior pastor) the influence and power of black women to their black churches is critical to the success of the black church. At this point, I must also acknowledge that I have an affiliation with both churches selected for this study. However, since I feel that today's black churches have moved away from their role of social justice advocates; I do not think that my affiliation will impact my ability to objectively examine and critique the services provided by either church.

I entered this study with great excitement in the possibility of exploring how today's black churches are intentional in their efforts to address social justice issues, such as the underachievement of African American Youth. As a young child, I listened with great care and concern to stories from family members regarding how their service to the black church lead to their involvement in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In my childhood church I received lessons on our church's rich history, which included the proud fact that our church and the school adjacent to it were built on the land donated by black men. In my childhood church I also received messages regarding the

need to show “the white man” just how fearfully smart I was as young African American student. In my childhood church, having a college degree was not the exception; but the hidden expectation. My childhood church was filled with educators, lawyers, businessmen (and women), and other professionals. Although, college may have been the hidden expectation the outright message was to be and do your best in all endeavors. For those of us who may have aspired to work in professional careers we had professional congregation members who were willing to share insight into their occupations. For those who aspired to be laborers, we had mechanics, electricians, and other laborers who were willing to provide apprenticeships. The person that I have become is attributed to the nurturing and support I received from the members of my childhood church. They instilled in me a sense of black pride and the need for black achievement.

Although I bring my positionality into this study, what I to learnt from this study far exceeded the risk of my involvement as a public school educator, African American mother, and black church member. I entered into this study with both fond memories of my childhood church and a critique of the level of activism present into today’s black churches. I purposefully selected two black churches with a reputation of public school involvement in anticipation that through interview, observation, and document review I would discover various levels of present day prophetic activism and that this study would serve to highlight such activism. Furthermore, I entered this study with great hope that this research will teach me and all those who read it how the social engagement of the black church, during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, is being reincarnated into today’s 21<sup>st</sup> century black churches. Again, the main goal of this study

was to highlight how black churches can serve as a bridge between the home and school in actively addressing the educational needs of African American youth attending public school.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

A review of the literature illustrates the attention that has been directed to the achievement gap that exists between black and white students (Aub et al., 2010; Barton, 2004; Denbo & Jones, 2002; Hillard, 2001; Parker, 2001; Price, 2008). The purpose of this study was to address how black churches are used to socialize African American students for success in today's public schools. The literature suggests that the black church is an appropriate out-of-the-school resource to address the current educational status of African American youth enrolled in public schools for the following reasons: first, the black church is significant to African American communities and has a history of addressing both spiritual and social needs of African Americans; secondly, the black church is vital to the transmission of values and ethics that align to societal and finally, the contemporary black church leadership of the black female can be used to promote and enhance black church-black family-public school partnerships.

The time has come for school leaders to look outside the public school building to find solutions for student achievement. Therefore, this study is intended to inform educators of the richness found within black churches and dismiss any deficit views educators may have of African American communities. The stories from study participants illustrate how African American adults use their understanding of race to

enhance social capital by socializing African American students for global citizenry, which requires academic proficiency.

In Chapters IV and V, I will draw upon the voices of study participants, researcher's observations, and information contained from church documents to highlight how the conceptual framework created for this study explains how black churches socialize African American youth for public school success. Chapter IV will provide a discussion of how black church goers' understanding of race provides a justification for using critical race theory to explain why black church goers become involved in social issues, such as the underachievement of African American students in today's public schools. In Chapter V, I highlight how adult, black church goers use social learning techniques, motivation and modeling, to enhance the social capital available to youth, black church goers thus forming coded information as previously describe in Chapter II. Chapter V will be devoted to illustrating specific practices used or that could be potentially used by black church goers that specifically address the academic needs of African American youth attending public schools. In Chapter VI, the provided examples will be used to explore the prevalence of prophetic activism and it will inform school leaders of the conditions that foster prophetic activism within the black church. Indeed, it is important for school leaders to know the conditions that foster prophetic activism because a church's ability to reach more than the youth that regularly attend a worship service will be instrumental in the ability of faith-based partnerships to improve the teaching and learning opportunities of African American youth.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS OF WHY BLACK CHURCHES ENGAGE IN EDUCATIONAL ISSUES**

The purpose of this collective case study was to use the voices of study participants, researcher's observation and document review to highlight the role the black church plays in socializing school-aged youth for public school success. The two churches selected for this study were located in an urban North Carolina city and both were reported as having developed partnerships with the local school district. Through a review of each church's historical documents, I discovered that both churches were organized in 1900. According to Gaines (2010), the black church has had to rely on itself for survival. This is true for both Gospel Baptist Church and Worship Baptist Church. The history of both churches reveals that members of African American communities were responsible for acquiring the land, securing building materials, and served as the laborers that built the churches. The section that follows highlights the history of each church and provides an overview of the worship experience. A church's history and style of worship service may be keys to what attracts black church goers and may influence the level of black church activism (Gaines, 2010).

#### **Church Histories**

Gospel Baptist Church began as a 30x40 wooden framed structure. Although the church had its own building, during the first nine years, the church only held weekly

Sunday school services. During this time, worship service was held the first Sunday of each month. The weekly Sunday school services were co-led by a women and the monthly worship service was led by the church's then male pastor. In 1928, the church moved from its original location to its current location. As the African American communities surrounding the church began to grow, the church developed ministries that allowed members to worship, fellowship, and become more active within their communities. These ministries included: the Missionary Circle, Senior Choir, Usher Board, and Youth Sunshine Band. During the 1950s and 1960s, Gospel Baptist Church continued to expand and developed ministries that would address the social and spiritual needs of the youth in its community. For example, during this time period, the church began its own Boy and Girl Scout troops, devoted a specific Sunday to the worship needs of youth, and converted the fellowship hall into classrooms and a kitchen – both with central air conditioning. These additions to the facility allowed the church to serve as a meeting place to address the social needs of the community as well as provided a space where children could come throughout the week to work on their schooling. The historic documents of Gospel Baptist Church revealed that since its inception the church has been concerned with the betterment of the African American community by providing a place for community members to come together in worship and fellowship. The members of Gospel Baptist Church have provided services, such as a food and clothing bank, that address the local needs of their community as well as provide services, such as mission to Africa that addresses the church's role in global affairs. Currently, the church has

approximately 400 members on record and is led by Pastor Clarence. Pastor Clarence has been the senior pastor for the past 13 years. He holds Bachelor of Arts, Masters of Divinity, and Doctorate of Divinity degrees. Pastor Clarence is married; he and his wife have school-aged children.

Unlike Gospel Baptist Church, Worship Baptist Church didn't start with a building of its own; during the first three years, the church members meet at each other's homes without an official senior pastor. Since its inception the church has maintained weekly services. The first church building was erected in 1905. In 1965, the church moved to its third location and remained there until 1981 when it moved to its current location. The current location started out as a 22,000 square foot lot and has now grown to over 40 acres. Since 1985, Worship Baptist Church has experienced rapid growth. As a result, in 1997, a new facility was built to address the needs of the growing congregation and African American community in which the church is anchored. The current building has classrooms that are used by members of the community for everything from weekly exercise classes to community watch meetings. Like Gospel Baptist Church the members of Worship Baptist Church provide services that address the local needs of the community as well as the church's role in our global society. The church offers a food bank and has a system to help community members with utility bills; the church provides a homeless ministry; and the church has sent money to several countries to fund various mission programs. Currently, the church has approximately 5000 members on record and is led by Pastor Daniel. Pastor Daniel has been the senior pastor for over 35 years. He holds Bachelor of Science, Masters of Divinity, and Doctorate of Ministry degrees.

Pastor Daniel is married; he and his wife have adult children and school-aged and college-aged grandchildren.

### **The Worship Experience**

For the past 112 years, both churches have established themselves as pillars of the communities in which they are anchored. Although, there is a vast difference in the membership of each church; study participants revealed that a sense of belonging is what drew them to and keep them at their churches. For example, Kerry, who is a member of Gospel Baptist Church, stated, “We feel like family. We work well together. So that’s what has attracted us [speaking on behalf of her family] and that’s what keeps us here.” This same sentiment was echoed by Tracy, who is a member of Worship Baptist Church, “I just feel a part of something; like I belong”. Kerry’s and Tracy’s statements highlight how, according to Moss (2003), many black church goers are drawn to their churches for opportunities to fellowship with others who provide a sense of commonality.

Through my observations of each church, I discovered that each church offers a unique Sunday worship experience. Due to the size of the sanctuary, which I estimate comfortably seats about 350; the worship service at Gospel Baptist Church is more intimate and, on the Sundays I observed, all available seats were taken. The church’s Media Ministry also provides digital audio recordings of the services, which allows the church to reach more than those who were physically present during the church service. Throughout the Sunday worship services, I observed Pastor Clarence addressing church goers by name and, when appropriate, including details of their lives into the sermon. On each of my observations at this church, I observed the choir leading the congregation

through hymns found in the traditional Hymnal books. This reminded me of my childhood church and how I first learned to read music not from my music teachers; but from singing hymns at church. Gospel Baptist Church also reminded me of my childhood church in that, on the Sundays that I observed, Pastor Clarence wore a robe and the elder ladies of the church wore nice church hats. From my observations I determined that business attire was a laid back as church attire went; “Sunday’s Best” was the norm.

Working in the same urban North Carolina city in which Gospel Baptist Church and Worship Baptist Church are located, I know from previous experience that if you ask African Americans who live in this city to tell you about Worship Baptist Church they tend to focus on the size of the church as it relates to both the facilities and church membership. Due to the physical size of the church, Worship Baptist Church offers a total different worship experience when compared to Gospel Baptist Church. I estimate that the sanctuary, which includes a balcony, seats approximately 3200. I observed that approximately two-thirds of the seats are filled during the Sunday worship service. The church also provides live online streaming as well as audio recordings; therefore, it is hard to determine the number impacted by the sermon on any given Sunday. The congregation does not use traditional Hymnal books; lyrics to songs are displayed on two large screens at the front of the church. Many of the songs sung were contemporary praise and worship gospel songs. Due to congregation size and the physical design of the auditorium styled sanctuary, it is hard for Pastor Daniel, senior pastor, to always personally acknowledge members and include their personal stories into his sermon. I observed that the dress code at Worship Baptist Church is truly “come as you are”. I

observed church goers in jeans, work uniforms, and of course, there were some church hats as well.

Despite the difference in the Sunday worship experiences, Gospel Baptist Church and Worship Baptist Church do have some commonalities as it relates to the overall black church worship experience. At both churches, black church goers interact with each other in a manner that shows support and concern. At both churches, I observed church goers praying for each other. Both Pastor Clarence and Pastor Daniel use the “turn to your neighbor” method in which they ask church goers to turn to their neighbor and make a declaration that aligns to the sermon topic. This prevents church goers from passively listening to the sermon. The overall order of service is similar at both churches: open with prayer and scripture, song, church announcements, special presentations, song, offering, song, the message, and benediction. I don’t know and didn’t ask if Pastor Daniel and Pastor Clarence personally knew each other; however, I did observe commonalities in their sermons and the way in which the sermons were presented. Both pastors used the Bible to provide a 21<sup>st</sup> century word of encouragement and challenges to their congregations (i.e., Pastor Daniel reminded black church goers of the need to give back to the community; Pastor Clarence spoke to the youth about the importance of giving back once they “made it”). Both pastors began their sermons calmly and concluded the sermons with loud voices accompanied by the organist hitting notes on the organ as if to provide the punctuation to the pastor’s sentences. Based on my observations, I concluded that a black church goer would receive Biblically based teaching at both churches; however, the atmosphere (i.e., traditional verses contemporary) is the one thing that I

observed that distinguished one church for the other. Although, I personally prefer a more contemporary style of worship, like what I experienced at Worship Baptist Church; I was impressed by the strong sense of family that I witnessed at Gospel Baptist Church. Not only did Pastor Clarence know everyone by name; the members knew each other as well. Each church made me feel important and relevant in my role of participant observer.

### **Restatement of Research Questions**

As previously stated, a church's history and the type of worship experience offered to black churchgoers can be a catalyst for social activism (Gaines, 2010). Although Gospel Baptist Church and Worship Baptist Church were purposefully selected because of their reputations of collaboration with the local school system; each church's history and educational status of the senior pastor also indicates the potential that lies within these churches for prophetic service. Billingsley and Morrison-Rodriguez (1998) state that during times of civic crisis black churches become involved with civil issues when (1) the church is strong and resourceful and (2) the church is led by a pastor who is highly learned and committed to social change. Pastor Daniel and Pastor Clarence hold the position of senior pastor within their respective churches; however, in black churches leadership should be viewed more in terms of who (single person or group) holds the power to influence decision making. Typically, these people are black women because of the commitment they make to their churches through their service to the church. Although Billingsley and Morrison-Rodriguez's (1998) second condition refers to a single church leader, the data collected as a result of this study confirms that, in black churches, the decisions made by the lead pastor are done so with influence from members

within the body, especially women. The fact that both churches have a history that is extends 100 years and are led by leaders committed to social change provides rationale for using the data collected from this study to provide insight into the prevalence of prophetic activism. Through the use of interview, observation, and document review I was able to identify important themes that address the research questions that guided this study.

Again, they are:

1. Why do black churches become engaged in social issues, such as the education of African American youth attending public schools?
2. How do black churches address the social and academic needs of African American school-aged youth in their communities and who is responsible for the work?
3. How can the efforts of black churches inform education leaders in developing faith-based partnerships with black churches?

As discussed in Chapter II, the student-teacher relationship is heavily impacted by the teacher's understanding of the student's culture and the level of trust the student has for the teacher (California State University at Northridge, n.d.). When teachers are able to demonstrate care and concern towards their students they often are able to break through emotional barriers and create a learning environment that is conducive for the development of each student's potential (Aultman, et al., 2009; Kabbalah and Education, n.d.). In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss how both adult and youth black churchgoers shared information that aligns with the literature and reveals that in their personal opinions African American school-aged children are adversely impacted by a



public institution that values one race over the their own. The views shared by study participates regarding the impact race has on African American student achievement helped me to form a response to the first of my three research questions. From the participants, I learned that race negatively impacts the student-teacher relationship. As will be discussed, black church goers believe that African American students are held to lower teacher expectations and are not provided the same level of care as white students because of their race.

**Question 1: Why do Black Churches become engaged in social issues, such as the education of African American youth attending public schools?**

Through their own voices, and supported in the literature by Hawley & Nieto (2010), black church goers revealed that in their experiences the advancement of white students over black students comes from societal values that set white attributes as the norm while ignoring the fact that all students bring cultural values and strengths to their learning experiences. Some of the adult participants – which included a parent, a church volunteer, and a pastor – also attempted to address how, in their view, the desegregation of North Carolina schools during the 1960s and 1970s helped to build a climate in which the race of African American youth is not valued (Burgman, 2011). It should be noted, that the local school system in which the two black churches are located was fully integrated 41 years ago (Burgman, 2011). Bernice, age 58, who is one of the Youth Choir Advisors at Gospel Baptist Church, provided a statement that best summarizes black church goers' sentiment regarding race, culture, and desegregation:

Race is not understood and I don't know if it's valued with equity in the public schools. We talk about integration and that's what we wanted; but I don't think that might have been the focus of integration. What we wanted was equity and that's what I want to see in public education today. I want to see leaders and those people who directly work with minority students, especially African American children, to be receptive to them. There are some likenesses [between black and white students]; but there are also some differences - because of our culture background; because of the community in which we live; because of the differences in our experiences. So again, I don't think the schools get it.

In this statement, Bernice shares how the mixing of racial groups may not have been the focused of desegregation. She states that, in her opinion, the focus of desegregation should have been to provide equity to both black and white children. This statement highlights how black church goers are aware that race impacts the quality of education provided to African American students and that desegregation may have had an impact on the devaluing of African American culture in today's public schools. As I explain below, the data collected from study participants show that black church goers believe that race negatively impacts the student-teacher relationship African American students and public school teachers. The data collected and analyzed for this study reveals that black churches become engaged in social issues, such as education, for the following reasons: (1) to provide programs and services that counteract the low expectations many public school educators set for African American students; and (2) to provide programs and services that increase the number of concerned adults attached to African American students by restoring a sense of community that was removed from the public schools of this selected urban North Carolina city during the desegregation era of the 1960s and 1970s.. The specifics of the programs and services offered by black church goers will be explored in Chapter V. However, as it relates to the first research questions, it is

important that I acknowledge that black church goers' understanding of race provides the motivation for engaging in social issues and offering educational services and programs to youth church goers that aim to address African American student achievement.

**Race Impacts the Student – Teacher Relationship.** Bernice's sentiment, "I don't think the schools get it" was also echoed by several black church goers as it relates to the expectations educator's set for African American school-aged children attending public schools. For example, Kerry, who is a parent of African American school-age children as well as the new Youth Director at Gospel Baptist Church, stated:

If they [public school teachers] had one experience with an African American student that wasn't positive; they kind of stereotype – especially when the student is from a different socioeconomic background or if they don't have the parents who are present. They [public school teachers] kind of assume that maybe this [working with an African American student] is just a lost hope; let me just do my job so I can get out of here by 4:00pm.

Not only does Kerry's statement speak to the impact of educator expectation; but it also addresses how these expectations may be impacted by the student's socioeconomic and family (i.e., traditional family, single parent, or family lead by grandparent) status as well. According to Gaines (2010), current statistics show that African American children are more likely to be raised in non-traditional families and the socioeconomic status of these families is subpar when compared to white families. Therefore, educators who already buy into the assumed inferiority of African American students may, as Kerry implies, give up if they teach a child who has a low socioeconomic status or has a non-traditional family status (Gaines, 2010; Sizemore, 2005). Educators who function with such a mentality may begin to view students through the previously described discourse

of deficit as defined by Powell Pruitt (2004). When educators use a discourse of deficit they tend to view black students, their families, and communities as incompetent when compared to white students, their families, and communities (Powell Pruitt, 2004). This type of deficit thinking was described by Pastor Clarence when he stated, “because of that [race] I think the perception of all African Americans is they’re lower than their counterparts whoever they may be.”

In this study, the youth participants were keenly aware of how teacher expectations impact the educational services available to them. As stated in Chapter III, the voices of youth participants were captured at two focus groups; one held at each church. As a reminder, in order to maintain anonymity, the names of focus-group participants were not recorded. It should be noted that the youth participants self-identified themselves as “good” students and some provided clarification statements that lead me to believe that the majority of them participated in advance courses and were performing at or above grade/course expectations. However, despite the positive way in which the youth participants referred to their own intellectual ability; collectively they made statements which highlighted that because of their race each of them had had experiences with educators who determined their worth by societal norms that place emphasis on skin color over individual ability. A few students from Worship Baptist Church also provided answers that seem to distinguish themselves from African American children in lower classes. For example, one of the female students made the following comment:

Because sometimes the teachers/adults think that black people can't do anything white people can do. But it's not that. It's just that sometimes they [African American students] need more help or even challenging work. When you give them [African American students] challenging work the students may have a little difficulty; but we can do it.

Although, not all of the student participants distinguished themselves from the African American sub-group; additional research may be needed to examine the effect of educational practices such as, curricular tracking, have on students in the lower tracks as well as students in the advance tracks. What the literature does show is that whether in advance or lower track classes, African American students are viewed as black first, which is layered with assumptions of inferiority (Holloway & Keppel, 2005; Ladner, 2007; Lewis, 2001; Powers, 2007). As it relates to teacher expectations, another female student from Worship Baptist Church added:

Sometimes they [teachers] look at us and let's say they give a problem and half the blacks miss the problem they think it's because the black students didn't care or didn't pay attention in class. But if the white people get it wrong then they [teachers] think, "Oh, they [white students] were tired and they deserve another chance".

When specifically asked if race impacts a teacher's expectation, all of the participants at the Worship Baptist youth focus-group shouted, "Yes" and shook their heads in agreement. One of the female participants had the following to say:

Well, I think it does. Some of it is that the kids might not be putting forth the effort. But then the teachers, if like the teachers don't put that much on the black kids and they don't teach them [African Americans] as much as the white kids. So, it's on both; but the black kids are doing what the teacher thinks they can do.

The responses from the young ladies of Worship Gospel Baptist provide insight into the view African American school-aged youth have regarding the impact race has on teacher expectations. Although the youth participants did not indicate that they went to the same schools, they did share similar experiences as it relates to teacher expectations.

Another issue addressed by study participants was the concept of “care”. A male participant from the Gospel Baptist Church youth focus-group shared his experience of being in an advance class, “I know that some teachers don’t really care. My teachers don’t relate to me. I am in an advance class and I’m the only one [African American male] and I just feel like she is always watching me and no one else.” Some adults also acknowledged how the concept of care impacts teacher expectation and thusly African American student performance. For example, Pastor Albert, the Youth Pastor at Worship Baptist shared:

Also, I feel as if in the public education system, I think you only have about 3 out of every 10 teachers who really care about their students and what they learn and whether they learn or if they pass or fail. So, to answer your questions I think it’s [the status of public education for African American students] is dwindling; but if we had more teachers who cared it could change the environment of those kids who are not motivated to learn and don’t understand how important an education is.

Pastor Albert added:

Honestly, I think that their [African American students] race does matter to a certain extent. I think that you have some African American teachers who care more towards African American students. However, you also have some African American teachers who, based on my 13 years of working with the school system, belittle your African American students and who care nothing about them [African American students] and cater to their Caucasian students because those are the ones who make their scores look great. You have, on the other side,

Caucasian teachers who cater to the African American students because they care and they want them to grow out of the environments they came from. And then you also have Caucasian teachers who stigmatize African American students; who don't care what they do, what they look like [referring to grooming], what their papers look like [referring to quality of work], and they don't try to help because they automatically assume that they [African American students] can't do it.

Pastor Albert's comments bring to surface another question as it relates to race and that is, "Does the race of the teacher matter"? During the youth focus-group at Worship Baptist Church, I got the opportunity to ask, "Do you feel that the race of the teacher impacts African American student performance"? As soon as this question was asked, all of the participants enthusiastically replied, "Yes" and/or shook their head in agreement with the statement. This question generated a lot of excitement that caused the students to respond simultaneously. After I was able to regain focus, four young ladies gave their response aloud to the group. One of the participants shared, "In 2<sup>nd</sup> grade I had a black teacher and she was really strict on the black people and she didn't seem that strict on the white people. But I understand now it's because she wanted us [African American students] to do well". During the same focus-group, another student added:

It's mostly white teachers' expectations that are low. Like most of the time they [white teachers] they think black people just listen to Little Wayne or something. But I was at the library one day and there was a white person listening to Little Wayne.

Yet, another student added, "Because she [African American teacher] wants the black students to achieve more. However, there are some white teachers who want us to succeed. It's just that black teachers are more willing to help". Overall, these young ladies provided statements that lead me to believe that they feel that many African

American teachers are more willing to provide an atmosphere of high expectations and a place where their culture is valued. As we closed our discussion of this particular question, another female from the focus-group added:

At my school you have different kinds of teachers. You have a Turkish teacher, white teachers, and one black teacher. Okay, well, sometimes the white person may not care as much about the black student and their education. I think the black teacher is going to make more out of the black student and more out of the white student. You know that they will give them an equal shot.

The statements from the four focus-group participants coupled with the enthusiasm shown by all of the focus-group participants in response to the question demonstrates that African American youth believe that a teacher's own race may have a negative impact on the learning experiences of African American youth enrolled in public schools.

The majority of new teachers entering the teaching profession are white and middle classed (Curry, 2010). White teachers who do not hold high expectations for African American youth or who do not provide equitable levels of care demonstrate how their own culture may be set to a position of privilege that can lead to misunderstandings and misconceptions about "the learning capabilities, motivation, and academic talents of African American youth" (Curry, 2010, pg. 406). Overall, the voices of the study participants highlight that in our public education system, these misunderstandings and misconceptions cause many educators to overlook the giftedness of our black students and set low expectations in their ability to perform intellectually (Barrett, 2010). The expectations set by educators for African American students are often done in a manner



that assumes presumed deficits found in African American culture verses addressing systemic racism (Crenshaw et. al., 1995; Delgado & Stefanie, 2001; Hillard, 2001).

According to Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, and Campbell (2005), it is imperative that educators explore their personal attitudes, values, and understanding of how race and social status inform their educative practices and thusly impacts their interactions with students. The responses from study participants reveal that black church goers are aware of the low expectations many educators have regarding the academic ability of African American students. In addition, some of the participants provided information that attributes the decline in the student-teacher relationship to the impact desegregation had on the public schools in the selected urban North Carolina city.

**Desegregation Removed Church-Home-School Collaboration.** Fifty-eight years after the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that mandated school desegregation throughout the United States, Sizemore (2005) argues that a mistake was made with the ruling as it relates to addressing the assumed superiority of the white race. As previously stated, at the time of the 1954 ruling African American communities had their own all-black schools, colleges, churches, and universities that were led by competent all-black staffs (Burgman, 2011; Sizemore, 2005). The stories shared by some of the study participants reveal that today some black church goers acknowledge that the quality of care and concern available to African American youth during the time of segregation is not available at the same levels today. For example, Pastor Daniel, who has been the senior pastor of Worship Baptist Church for over 35 years shared:

Well let me qualify by saying, I think there are some efforts being made to help the quality of African American youth. But I think in comparison to what it has been it is not as good. I'll qualify that with pre-integration. I think prior to integration African American children got an education that involved life skills that involved how to not only relate to the world around; but also how to be a productive person from a vantage point other than just economics.

Pastor Daniel's response, in conjunction with the responses of other study participants, reveals that desegregation created a loss of community, which resulted in decreased collaboration between the home, the school, and the church. For example, a male parent from the parent focus-group shared:

There is a disconnect with their [African American students] teachers because they[teachers] don't have the community purpose; they don't have the teacher who feels that they have obligations to the parents because most of them [teachers] don't know the parents and they don't see the families and students outside of school.

According to another male parent, not only did desegregation take away a sense of community it also removed positive role models:

We don't have role models that are of their [African American students] color. We fought so hard against the concept of separate but equal that in some ways I think we hurt our children by doing that because we lost the community that supported black teachers. If you were, especially looking at the historical facts, a teacher let's say of children in this church. Typically, the teacher would also be a member of this church and the church supported that teacher.

Another response from Bernice indicates that desegregation removed a constant focus on African American history and this too has a negative impact on student performance:

They [African American students] don't know the things we went through. You talk about scholarship and you have an Honor Society and they say to us we are only going to let three blacks in and you might have 50 black scholars; but only 3 get in. Those are the things that need to be told.

Pastor Daniel, Bernice, and the parents who shared their responses are of age to have knowledge of the impact desegregation had in their local school system during the 1960s and 1970s. As previously stated, the schools located in the selected urban North Carolina city were fully integrated by 1971 (Burgman, 2011). The voices of these study participants provides insight into a level of care they felt was available to African American students prior to desegregation that is not available to African American students today.

I feel compelled to stop here and acknowledge that none of the study participants led me to believe that they feel that we need to go back to segregated schools. For example, during our interview, Pastor Daniel acknowledged that at one time one of his own grandsons attended a private, predominately white, Christian school; but he encouraged his grandson's parents to enroll him in public school because of the opportunities to interact with a diverse group of people. Through my interactions with study participants I got the impression that, in their opinion, a major downfall of desegregation was the removal of positive African American role models from the public school sector and a breakdown in the home, school, and church partnership. Burgman (2011) who conducted her study in the selected urban North Carolina city confirms that one of the major downfalls of desegregation in this city was the decrease in the number of African American principals and teachers assigned to public schools after desegregation.

Due to the assumed superiority of white educators, many black educators were dismissed leaving African American students to be taught by teachers who no longer had a connection to them, their families, or their communities (Burgman, 2011; Sizemore, 2005).. As I detail later, their responses also revealed that the black church can play a key role in restoring the collaboration between home, school, and church.

I guess throughout life you have been bombarded with the idea of separation of church and state. But like I said the home, the school, and the church were the tripods on which lives were built and I see that kinda' torn down now. So, why not; if it's broke we need to fix it. So one way that perhaps we can fix it is to have more partnerships between church and school. (Bernice)

The responses of study participants reveal that many black church goers yearn for a return to a time in which the African American community – especially schools, homes, and churches – worked together in support of the educational needs of African American children.

As shared by the adult and youth black church goers, race has a negative impact on the expectations set by some public educators for African American students. The black church goers who participated in this study perceived that because of their race and the assumed inferiority of black students; many public school teachers set low expectations regarding the academic abilities of African American students. The responses of study participants reveal that black church goers acknowledge that the relationship between African American students and public school teachers has been negatively impacted. In their opinions, desegregation of this urban North Carolina school system removed from the public schools African American leaders and teachers who

were vested in the academic performance of African American students due to their connection to the community in which they worshiped and lived. Because of this, black church goers at Gospel Baptist Church and Worship Baptist Church were motivated to provide services and programs that counteracted negative teacher expectations and purposefully connected African American youth with caring and concerned adult, black church goers.

**Some Public Educators are Unaware of the Importance of Race.** My analysis of the data began with a quote from study participant, Bernice, who said, “I don’t think the schools get it”. This sentiment can best summarize the feelings of the black church goers as it relates to the achievement of African American students enrolled in public schools. According to study participants, race is important and educators do not understand how race negatively impacts the teaching and learning experiences of African American youth.

I think that being African American also has some determination on it [student performance] as far as them being a minority and the type of class they are in. They are already stigmatized as to what they supposedly can do and what they supposedly can’t do. And there are several who beat the stigmatism; but I think race has an impact on some teacher’s where they just already know this child is not going to be able to do it regardless so they don’t try to help. (Pastor Albert)

A mentality such as this has an impact on all African American students. According to Kerry, “I think we have a lot of African Americans who are excelling that might not get the spotlight as much as the ones who are not excelling. You’ve got a few who rise to the top.” The views of the black church goers challenge educators to look beyond race and recognize the various levels of giftedness found in all children (Barrett, 2010; Yosso,

2005). As Kerry states, “You have got to have teachers who are open minded and sees just the child or student and treats all students fairly.” Educators have to acknowledge that racism is systemic and that many African American students are unable to obtain an appropriate education that addresses their race, ethnicity, and the need for proactive African American community involvement (Barton, 2004; Comer 2002, Comer & Haynes, 1990; Denbo, 2002; Hale, 2004; Hawley & Nieto, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Perry et al., 2003). As Bernice states:

I believe that as a whole African American students don’t perform up to their potential, and I guess the parenthesis part of that would be: what are the causes that keep them from performing to their potential? I think they vary, we talk about background, we talk about neighborhood cultures that they come from, we talk about economic disparities, we talk about being born to young parents and you look back and you think all of that happened in the past; but, again, it seems to be magnified more and more.

Bernice’s statement highlights her understanding of Powell Pruitt’s (2004) discourse of deficit. She acknowledges that when they enter public schools, African American students, as a whole, are viewed as lacking. Bernice acknowledged that “problems” involving background, neighborhood, socioeconomic status, and family status have always been present in African American communities. However, according to some of the study participants, the relevance of the African American community has been viewed through a lens of deviance since their city’s schools desegregated. These deviant views create a system of hegemony that impacts the public school system. Therefore, as shared by Pastor Clarence, the senior pastor at Gospel Baptist Church, “...the status of public education is lacking simply because of a lack of understanding of

our African American youth”. The participants in this study revealed that race is important and that educator’s lack of understanding on this issue continues to perpetuate assumptions of white superiority in the public school system. The information shared by black church goers confirms their perception of racial inequality.

### **Links to Conceptual Framework: The Centrality of Race and Racism**

The conceptual framework that served as the foundation of this study was described in Chapter II. As a reminder, the conceptual framework draws from critical race theory’s notions about the centrality of race and racism in American society, plus social learning theory and the concept of prophetic activism. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight how this study links to the centrality of race and racism. Based on the views and opinions shared by the study participants I have concluded that the centrality of race and racism does provide insight as to why black church goers involve themselves in social issues, such as the underachievement of African American school-aged youth attending public schools.

Critical race theorists disagree with norms that set white as the standard and suggest that tools, such as black churches, be utilized to challenge the norms of oppressive systems, such as public education (Giles, 2010). Black church goers believe that in public schools African American students are view as “black” first. The literature suggests that in American society, “black” is viewed through a lens of deviance (Ladner, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Powell Pruitt, 2004). When public school teachers see “black” first, according to study participants, this creates a system in which African American children are held to lower expectations and the same level of care available to

white students is not provided to black students. As revealed through this study, black church goers have a keen understanding that those in power have created definitions, assumptions, and procedures that are embedded in hegemonic belief systems and yield hegemonic behavior (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Lewis, 2001).

Some black church goers have an understanding of the relationship that used to exist between the home, the school, and church and believe that today's black church is in a position to regain its status as an integral aspect in the education of African American students (Madyun & Witherspoon, 2010). Due to their historical significance in American society, black churches provide an analytical second eye into understanding the "overt and covert nature of the relationship between race and education" (Giles, 2010, p. 363). Black churches have had to be places of spiritual development as well as become political institutions that address racial inequality (Pinderhughes, 1992). According to Billingsley & Morrison-Rodriguez (1998), "because of its history, values, strength, adaptability, and independence of ownership, the black church is in a strong position to serve as an action system during periods of severe and sustained crisis in African American communities and families" (p. 33). McCray et al. (2010) also add, "the black church is an appropriate institution within the holistic intervention to help improve some of the said conditions many African American students regularly confront in their matriculation through the educational system" (p. 233).

As it relates to the conceptual framework for this study, the centrality of race and racism provides an appropriate rationale as to why black churches become engaged in social issues. As revealed by the study participants, black church goers believe that race



has negatively impacted the student-teacher relationship between African American students and public school teachers. In their view, because of their race African American students are held to lower expectations than white students and are not provided the same level of care as white students. Therefore, as will be discussed in Chapter V, the negative impact race has on the student-teacher relationship motivates black church goers to provide programs and services to counteract low teacher expectations and to increase the number of concerned adults attached to African American youth. However, there was data that revealed a possible shift of the black church from an agenda that intentionally addresses the needs of the African American community. I feel it necessary to focus on this possible shift because (1) the immovability of race in American society creates hegemony in the economic and social domains, such as public schools, that negatively impact the educational experiences of African American school-aged youth (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004); and (2) historically, black churches have address racial inequality (Pinderhughes, 1992).

**A Move from an Intentional Black Agenda.** During my analysis of the data a surprising theme emerged, which relates to the identity of the black church as an institution that caters primarily to the needs of the African American community. Although, race can be used to justify the reasons why black church goers become engaged in social issues; surprisingly this study revealed that some black churches may be moving away from an agenda that is primarily African American orientated to a race neutral stance that focuses on the common experiences of all Christians in today's society – this is a theme that I was not anticipating. I find it necessary to address and discuss this

theme because the premise behind my work is that as an institution that has a history of activism in African American communities, the black church is in a position to address the current educational crisis faced by African American school-aged youth attending today's public schools. However, the emergence of this theme brings into question the level of advocacy that will be available to African American youth should the black church deliberate move from an agenda that acknowledges and recognizes the negative impact race has on African American student achievement (Comer & Haynes, 1990; Denbo & Jones, 2002; Hale, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 1997; McCray et. al., 2010).

This theme emerged primarily from data collected from Gospel Baptist Church, which indicates that the size of the church may impact the priority the church's leadership places on issues that are relevant to African American communities. When asked how race is defined in their church, members of Gospel Baptist shared responses that focus on the church's need to be accepting of other races. For example, Mae shared, "We just don't look at it [race]; I mean because we have a variety [of races] in our church. So, we just look at it as a big family and we don't look at it as just blacks". When asked to share her view, Sally stated, "This is something that I haven't had to personally deal with".

Kerry opted not to respond to the question. Bernice shared:

Race is important too and we are very tolerate of differences we have a mixed congregation. Being there [member of Gospel Baptist] 58 years that was not always the case so that has involved and has been accepted. It's good to say accepted as 'posed to tolerance. Tolerance is important; but acceptance is a step above that. We get along as a congregation; so that's not viewed as far as I know as anything negative at my church and I think that's a good thing. So, I think family and race continue to evolve in many settings and in the church.

Pastor Clarence, who has served as the senior pastor of Gospel Baptist church for the past 13 years, provided insight that may explain why his congregation feels the need to be less focused on the blackness of their church.

I think it's define as I've come in. I've taken the perception that yes I'm from African decent; but I am a mutt. I've got Indian in me; I've got white – probably got a few other things that I don't know of in me. So, it's change on how I think the preachers use to approach members here at [named church]. I've recognized that it's not just a black thing. It's not just a white thing. So when I talk to my congregation; I talk to them as Christians – not black or white. But yet we have black history month where we recognize that. But our white young people are involved in that as well. We have multi-racial families that come here so I've got to recognize that. We got Caribbean decent, we got Caucasian. So I've got to deal with that; I just don't focus on African American – especially as light as I am – and we understand that; but we respect all ethnicities. But at the same time we realize that we have a majority of African Americans but the biggest things we are all Christians.

In response to another question, Pastor Clarence also shared additional insight into his views regarding race and religion. Although Pastor Clarence's full response will be shared later, I feel compelled to highlight a portion of his comment that relates to race here as well, "...and that's to be an example to our black males AND white males we have white males here at [named church]...". During our interview, Pastor Clarence stressed the word, "and", and I got the impression that acknowledging that Gospel Baptist Church was not just a "black church" was important to him. I must admit that during my data analysis I read and re-read Pastor Clarence's quotes and constantly asked myself, "What happens to the resiliency of the African American community if the black church loses its African American focus?" When given the opportunity to respond to and clarify the transcription of our interview, Pastor Clarence did not provide any additional

clarification; therefore, I conclude that my initial reactions and analysis of the data provided by Pastor Clarence is accurate.

Like Gospel Baptist Church, Worship Baptist Church also has non-black church goers; however, opinions shared by the senior pastor of Worship Baptist, Pastor Daniel, and the youth pastor, Pastor Albert, show that the political focus of this church is still centered on the needs of the African American church goers. Pastor Albert shared:

I would answer that by saying I think it's [race is] define in the way our senior leadership and executive leadership presents it [race] to the body. I think if you listen to our senior leadership talk they say things such as, "we", meaning we as the African American race need to vote; "we" as the African American race need to educate our kids on saving money; "we" as the African American race – you know things like that. I think this church educates them [the congregation] in that way by making it plain and it's so obvious that this church is 99% African American. So, I think we tend, which is normal, to do things that cater to the African American race. Whether it be in our worship style, in the programs we select. Whether it be in decisions we make. But one thing that I heard our senior leadership say in our meeting is that the African American race has limits that people, and African American people themselves, put on them and those walls are to be broken and we as a church help people define what those walls are and tear them down so I think they [church leadership] just educate from the pulpit per say.

Pastor Daniel's response to the question was as follows:

Well, that is a difficult question. While we honestly try to pretend that race is not an issue – it is. Because the predominate participants in our church are African American. We have made some efforts – some failed and some succeeded – in trying to reach some other ethnic groups like Spanish speaking, like Caucasian, like Asians. I think culture plays a lot in it.

Pastor Albert's and Pastor's Daniel comments reveal that it is important for Worship Baptist Church to acknowledge that race does matter. In particular, Pastor Albert's

comment highlights how there is still a need for church leaders to be intentional in the messages that they provide to black church goers regarding race in our society.

Although information obtained from Gospel Baptist Church reveals that the black church goers who attend this church understand how race impacts the student-teacher relationship between African American students and public school teachers; I am concerned that within this church there is also an underlying message that race is not to be intentionally discussed within the church or directly from the pulpit. This type of action moves the church away from the church's historical role of functioning as the analytical mirror that reflects to society an understanding of the intersection of student achievement and systemic racism (Giles, 2010). The literature documents how the church has been instrumental in bringing to the forefront the paradox that exists between race relations in our society and the freedoms extended to all citizens (Gaines, 2010; Madyun & Witherspoon, 2010). The black church has played a significant role in leading, cultivating, and providing the moral, financial, and symbolic support to black church goers as well as other African American who may or may not frequently attend church (Mitchell, 2010). Historically, social justice and black religion have seemed inseparable; however, the information collected from some of this study's participants exposes a potential shift. It appears that some black churches are moving from a stance that is centered on the social oppression of African Americans to a more race neutral stance that uses the Christian faith as the attribute that links the church attendees to African American communities and the society at large. However, as documented in this chapter and in Chapter II, we know that some educators identify African American students as

black first and not by their unique learning abilities. Therefore, it goes to reason that in our society an African American Christian would be viewed as black first and not by their religious affliction. When African Americans are seen as black first assumptions of inferiority come into play. In a society that was founded on Christian principles, a black Christian is more likely to be discriminated against because of the color of their skin and not their religious practice (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 2007). Voices from study participants, disclosed the historically collaboration between the church, the home, and the school – which set these three institutions as the triad of African American communities. However, a potential shift of the black church from an African American focus calls us to question what happens to African American communities when the black church is no longer a part of that triad.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an analysis into the motivation behind black church involvement in social issues such as public education, as posed by my first research question. What was discovered is that black church goers perceive that race has negatively impacted the student-teacher relationship between African American students and public school teachers. Black church goers who participated in this study shared their views regarding the low expectations that are set for African American students and how these low expectations can be attributed to the race of African American students. Additionally, some adult and youth study participants revealed that race negatively impacts the level of care and concern available to black students as compared to that available to white students. The centrality of race and racism in American society can be

used to provide the theoretical rationale as to why black church goers' understanding of race is an appropriate motivation for their involvement in issue that address the educational experiences of African American youth enrolled in today's public schools. Because of their understanding of race and its negative impact on the student-teacher relationship between African American youth and public school teachers; adult, black church goers become motivated to provide services and programs that serve to counter low teacher expectations and build caring relationships between adult and youth, black church goers. The specifics of the services and programs made available to African American youth will be discussed in the next chapter as well as links to the second concept of the conceptual framework, which is social learning theory.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **ANALYSIS OF HOW BLACK CHURCHES ADDRESS THE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC NEEDS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH**

In this chapter I will provide a response to the second of my three research questions, which were restated in the previous chapter. This response will highlight how the services and programs offered by adult, black church goers align with concepts from Bandura's (1986) social learning theory. Social learning theory will be used to link my response to the second research question to the conceptual framework that guided this study. As will be discussed, adult black church goers use motivation and modeling to provide services and programs that address three key areas: (1) boost student motivation; (2) celebrate student achievement; and (3) promote academic success (Price, 2008). In this chapter I will also examine the significant role black women have within their black churches and how their involvement impacts the academic services and programs offered to African American youth.

#### **Question 2a: How do black churches address the social and academic needs of African American school-aged youth in their communities?**

When I began this study I knew it would be important to identify programs and services offered by either church that aligned with the examples provided by Price (2008) in his research about the conditions that mobilize community agencies on issues



addressing African American student achievement. I selected to use examples provided by Price (2008) because his examples specifically addressed the role the black church plays in addressing student achievement and aligned with Bandura's (1986) social learning theory. Price (2008) stated that programs and services implemented by black churches should address three key areas: (1) boost student motivation; (2) celebrate student achievement; and (3) promote academic success. It should be also noted that the key areas identified by Price (2008) also relate to the motivation behind black church activism. As discussed in Chapter IV, this study reveals that due to their understanding of how race negatively impacts the student-teacher relationship between African American students and public school teachers; adult, black church goers become motivated to provide services that counteract low teacher expectation, which can be done by promoting academic success. Also, due to the negative impact of race on the student-teacher relationship; adult, black church goers become motivated to network with African American youth in an effort to increase the number of caring adults linked to the student, which can be done by boosting student motivation and celebrating student achievement.

**Boosting Student Motivation and Celebrating Student Achievement.** The voices of study participants reveal that black church goers overwhelming support the black church's involvement in social issues, such as the current status of public education for African American youth. When asked, "Should black churches become involved with the academic needs of African American youth attending public schools?" and "How has this church implemented services/programs that address African American youth and their success in public schools?", the study participants' responses indicated the need for

the black church to become involved and provided insight into the types of current and potential services and programs offered within the church that address the black church's role in academia. For example, Sally, the former Youth Director at Gospel Baptist Church, responded to these two questions in a way that demonstrates how adult, black churchgoers attempt to socialize African American youth for academic success by providing surrogates who assist parents when the parents are unable to match their child with a needed resource. Sally stated, "I think they [black churches] should [be involved] because for those kids that don't have the grounded home environment; the church can offer something that is so desperately needed to help them excel". She added:

What I do is that I pair the student with a person I know. Such as, I know that Pastor is an English major; so if there is a child having a problem with English; Pastor is the one that I call. If there is a student having a problem in Math I know that I have a least four math majors ... I'm just like the liaison, the person who will help find somebody that will help them with their situation.

Similar to Sally's response, Kerry, the current Youth Director at Gospel Baptist Church, stated:

Like we have the Scholastic Committee Ministry, which is geared towards the educational needs of students in general. Like they arrange school supplies or match them up for tutoring. If you need something for the school; this is the committee that you can go to; they make those things accessible to the student so that they can have academic success.

According to Price (2008) many black churches already offer programs that have been designed to foster learning, such as tutorial services. However, as indicated by Sally's and Kerry's comments and confirmed through a review of relevant church

documents; Gospel Baptist Church does not have a formal tutorial program. Likewise, Worship Baptist Church does not have a formal tutorial program. Still, the adult, black church goers are able to provide specific academic assistance because there are volunteers within the church who are willing to match students to other adults who can help. All humans have the need for love, belonging, and acceptance. It is human nature to seek ways to meet this need within a social setting. Matching African American youth with caring adults who share a concern regarding the youth's academic success is a form of motivation. Students who are linked to and surrounded by caring adults are motivated to perform pro-social, and in this case pro-achievement, behaviors that will increase opportunities to be loved and accepted within the social setting (Barrett, 2010).

Price (2008) further explains how black churches can offer services that directly celebrate student achievement. The data collected as a part of this study demonstrates that at both Gospel Baptist Church and Worship Baptist Church, the adult church goers have implemented some student achievement programs. During her interview, Mae, a member of Gospel Baptist, shared:

If they make A or A/B honor roll. We let them have it where they can be recognized and ... then like we always try to keep some type of flyer out to them as to what's going on in the school system; when school is open; when school is close.

Kerry, who is the new Youth Director at Gospel Baptist, also added:

The church is responsible for it [the budget]. We [Youth Ministry] get a budget from the church and the ministry operates from that budget. They [Youth Ministry] also recognize academic success throughout the year through a newsletter, gift cards, rewards and things of that nature.

A student from the Worship Baptist Church youth focus-group provided an additional statement that emphasized how black churches dedicate time and money to recognize student achievement. She stated, “The church said if you make all “As” the whole year, during school, they are going to give you a chance to win an iPod or tablet”. Mae’s, Kerry’s, and the student from Worship Baptist comments underscore how important it is for the black church to create a climate that focuses on the academic achievement of students as well as their spiritual development (Price, 2008; Wynn, 2012).

**Promoting Academic Success by Allocating Resources.** In addition to boosting student motivation and celebrating student achievement Price (2008) states that it is also important for the black church body to commit resources that create an atmosphere that values African American youth. A review of church documents from Gospel Baptist Church illustrates the commitment the church has to academic services. For several years, the church’s Scholastic Committee has hosted a back to school event that is funding by church funds. The event provides school supplies and an opportunity for fellowship prior to the start of the school year. The Youth Pastor at Worship Baptist Church, Pastor Albert, shared how Worship Baptist Church had committed resources to academic areas. He shared, “Also, we are updating our library for a new computer lab for our students”. It should be noted that Worship Baptist Church also provides a full-time summer enrichment program as well as an after-school program. These programs are provided to any family for a weekly fee. The “our students” Pastor Albert mentioned was a direct reference to the students who participate in either or both the summer enrichment or after-school programs. However, the church’s library is available to all church goers;

therefore, more youth will benefit from the updated computer lab. During their interviews, Tracy, a member of Worship Baptist Church, and Pastor Daniel provided examples of what the members of Worship Baptist Church are currently doing to support African American student achievement. Tracy shared, "...by having services for our youth that teaches leadership skills, training, Biblical studies, and education to help with everyday life challenges." Pastor Daniel, senior pastor at Worship Baptist Church stated:

Well there are a number of things that we have done: (1) we have a male mentoring program that we have instituted; (2) we have SAT Prep; (3) we have programs designated for parents and adults to help them relate to students who are involved in the public schools. We have Lunch Buddy programs; we provide resources, equipment – like computers – for elementary, middle, and high schools; we support the athletic programs and the academic component of the local schools in public education. We provide scholarships for students going both to public and private schools [colleges/universities].

It should be noted that some of Worship Baptist Church's efforts, such as providing computers to local schools, not only benefit African American students, but also serve to benefit other ethnicities as well. In addition, such programs spotlight how the black church can be a resource that extends services beyond the four walls of the church building.

With the exception of funding for computers, most of the services and programs currently offered by these two churches require little resources. However, adult study participants did share some concerns regarding available resources, specifically financial resources:

I think the church has a role, a big role especially in the Black community. It's just unfortunate that in the world we have to deal with the financial, the social and even now a days you have to deal with the screening of who you have come in contact with your children and it becomes overwhelming. (Male parent from Gospel Baptist Church)

A female parent from Gospel Baptist Church shared:

I know we are talking about money; but I'm just thinking about the church I grew up in. It was more about expectations. It was always assumed that we were all going to succeed. It was never an option to fail a class. If somebody heard that you [were] getting below a "C"; somebody was coming to your house or calling your mama to say I know someone who can tutor your child have them over here at 5 o'clock today; we are going to help them. So, it was just the expectation that you are not going to fail. I don't see that in churches today anymore; they weren't distance if someone wasn't succeeding. There was a call or something and that doesn't take money that just takes time and being interested in the things that are going on.

In keeping with the theme that educational investment does not require money, a third parent, who was male, from the same focus group added:

When my wife and I started dating what drew me to her church was that the pastor was actually involved he went to the schools once a week. Now, granted I know that [named pastor] can't go to all the schools; but during that time that preacher was at the school once a week checking in on the students of the congregation.

The comments from the parents emphasize how the lack of financial resources should not prevent the black church from becoming involved in educational activism. The parents provided potential services that could be implemented with little to no financial commitment from the church. Related to the parents' comments are the "Real Talk Sessions" conducted by Pastor Albert, Youth Pastor at Worship Baptist Church.

During a Youth Advisors Meeting at Worship Baptist Church, Pastor Albert announced that he routinely visits four local high schools to conduct open discussion sessions with church youth and their friends. During these sessions Pastor Albert engages in open discussion with students on various issues from academics to paying from the Prom. Parent permission was required for participation in the sessions with Pastor Albert. As highlighted by Pastor Albert's example and describe by the parents from Gospel Baptist Church, visits from either the senior pastor or youth pastor are ways to address African American student achievement. Such endeavors require little to no financial commitment. The financial cost of a service or program should not be a deterrent to black church activism.

According to Gite (1993), the black church is capable of generating lots of capital when initiatives are supported by the senior pastor. I was able to observe this phenomenon. During the course of my study, Pastor Daniel, senior pastor at Worship Baptist Church, shared with his congregation the need the church had to upgrade media and technology equipment. It should be noted that the computers previously mentioned by Pastor Albert were a part of Pastor Daniel's request. After sharing with the congregation how much such an upgrade would cost, Pastor Daniel issued a challenge to the congregation to raise a large sum of money in the course of two months. At the conclusion of the campaign, Pastor Daniel reported that close to 500 families had contributed funding that far exceeded the \$300,000 he originally reported was needed. Due to their efforts, the church was able to move forward with the media and technology upgrades as well as address other facility needs.

As discussed in Chapter II, according to McDaniel (2008), the senior pastor is instrumental when it comes to how and if the black church becomes involved in social issues, such as the education of African American youth. The example of the capital campaign drive conducted at Worship Baptist Church illustrates that if the senior pastor is in support of educational services and programs; black church goers will be motivated to raise the capital needed to implement such programs. The challenge to do and the reasons for the need must be stated from the pulpit. The data collected at both churches documented how each church has committed financial resources to the ministries that serve the youth. Kerry, from Gospel Baptist, shared that the church provides a budget to the Youth Ministry. At Worship Baptist Church, a direct budget is provided to the youth department and each other ministry is required to allot a percentage of their budget to programs that their ministry can implement that directly impacts the youth.

When I began this study, I knew that the distinct differences in the congregation size of each church could also provide insight into the impact that church size has on the prevalence of prophetic activism. Although Gospel Baptist Church is much smaller than Worship Baptist Church, both churches provide similar services and programs that aim to address the educational needs of African American students. Although, I did not witness any capital campaigning from Gospel Baptist Church, a review of church artifacts documents that the church has been successful in previous campaigns to modify the church building and that these projects were “paid in full” prior to the start of construction. Therefore, like Worship Baptist Church the members of Gospel Baptist Church demonstrated that they are able to raise large amounts of capital when provided



the challenge to do so from the pulpit. From my observation I determined that the only impact church size had on church services and programs was that the larger organization structure of a mega-church may become a hindrance to service/program implementation. As stated in Chapter III, I was unsuccessful in coordinating a parent-focus group at Worship Baptist Church; this was partly due to the fact that several people are involved with event planning at this church. When organizing an event at this church there are several procedures that are required; a delay in any of the procedures has a negative impact on the event being organized.

### **Collaboration and Black Church Activism**

In addition to addressing concerns regarding financial resources, research shows that is important to consider the role of collaboration when assessing black church activism. According to Gaines (2010), one of the reasons the black church was so successful during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s was that black churches operated as a collaborative unit. If the black church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to experience the same level of success, as the black church of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Gains (2010) states that the modern black church must also function as a collective unit.

None of the study participants, including the senior pastors, shared comments that alluded to their church's involvement in collaborative efforts with other black churches regarding the educational needs of African American youth. If a black church is to be successful in addressing the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning needs of African American students there must be a willingness to create and sustain collaborative working relationships with

other black churches (Gaines, 2010). As stated by one of the study participants, this will require black church goers to put away their egos and work within and across denominational lines.

...if we put egos and as Pastor says, “Quick worrying about your position”. If churches could come together and say, “Hey, we are going to start a school; we are going to hire our own administrators; we all are going to get in a room and hash things out we might not agree on everything; but we are going to start a school system that would support our students and help them; it could be done and it would be great. I think that’s something the [black church] community is going to have to do and I think that having any child come to that type of collaborative situation will help that child. (Male parent from Gospel Baptist Church)

Such collaboration will also require black church goers, especially senior pastors, to ignore the theological differences that create denominational distinctions and agree to focus on concepts that address the welfare of black students (Gaines, 2010). The silence of study participants on the issue of collaboration does provide cause for an exploration into the culture and structure of the black church that prevents collective unity on social issues, such as education.

### **Overview of Current Services and Programs Offered by the Selected Black Churches**

Despite the lack of collaborative efforts and concerns regarding financial resources, the black churches that participated in this study do currently provide programs and services that address the educational needs of African American youth. Based on the data, I have created Table 3 which summarizes the services and programs that are currently provided to address student achievement of African American youth.

The table refocuses our attention back to Price's (2008) three levels of academic focus for black churches, which are: (1) boost student motivation; (2) celebrate student achievement; and (3) promote academic success. Many of the services and programs listed in Table 3, which is on the next page, require little financial resources.

**Table 3**

**Examples of Current Programs and Services Offered by the two Selected Black Churches**

<b>Boost Student Motivation</b>	<b>Celebrate Student Achievement</b>	<b>Promote Academic Success</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lunch Buddies</li> <li>• Incentives</li> <li>• Youth Newsletter</li> <li>• Biblical Training</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Black History Program</li> <li>• Youth Pastor Visits to School (e.g., "Real Talk Sessions")</li> <li>• Back to School Event</li> <li>• Networking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honor Roll Recognition</li> <li>• Achievement Celebrations</li> <li>• Support local Athletic and Academic programs</li> <li>• Provide Scholarships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal Tutorial Services</li> <li>• SAT Prep</li> <li>• Direct Donations (i.e., purchase of computers for local school)</li> <li>• After-School Program</li> <li>• Summer Enrichment Program Leadership Training</li> <li>• Parent Meeting</li> <li>• Church Announcements</li> </ul>

Table 3 reflects the combined list of services and programs that were documented during the data collection process. Neither Gospel Baptist Church nor Worship Baptist Church provides all of the services and programs listed in Table 3 – some of the services and programs were documented from Gospel Baptist Church whereas others were

documented from Worship Baptist Church. Table 3 documents the collective current ability of the selected black churches to address the academic needs of African American school-aged youth. The information contained in this table serves to inform both school leaders and black church leaders of the current ability of black churches to address the academic needs of African American youth. In the next session, I will discuss the potential or future endeavors black church goers can implement to further address the academic needs of African American youth.

### **Potential Services and Programs that Address the Academic Needs of African American Youth**

When asked what changes, if any, they would make to the church's programs, participants for both churches indicated the need for the church to provide tutorial services. For example, Mae, a member from Gospel Baptist, shared, "Yeah, there are things. I wish that there was some type of ... I would like to see more tutoring. I would like to see some type of summer program and those are the two things I can think of."

She also added:

I feel like they [black churches] could do a little better in educating them [African American youth] on reading and math. Make programs available for them even if it's nothing but afterschool or weekend programs right in the community so that they would not have to travel for additional learning.

Bernice, youth choir advisor from Gospel Baptist Church, shared:

We don't have a tutorial program; but I know that there have been some members that have tutored children. So in our [Youth Choir] little introduction conversation before we rehearse each time one of the advisors will share that, "We are supportive of you" and we try to keep them involved in the church.

One of the youth from the Worship Baptist Church focus-group shared her “wish list” for not only tutoring; but for more incentives and, like Mae, increased afterschool programs:

Offering tutoring programs and stuff or do more academic work with us ... Churches should have more afterschool programs. I think they should encourage us to do better in school because if you have the motivation to do good in school you will. Acknowledge us when we do good in school. Offer us incentives like they do in school. I think our church does a good job sometimes because I was in the little honor roll awards and that helped me ...

Pastor Albert, the Youth Pastor at Worship Baptist Church, shared:

When I was coming up you had a lot of churches that had tutoring every week. You had a lot of African American churches that had academic bowls; they provided all of these things that we could latch onto. The problem is that this generation has went away from that and it's become a problem because the African American church we have, I feel as a Pastor, it's our job to do what the school system is not.

This data indicates that at both Gospel Baptist Church and Worship Baptist Church there is a need to provide direct academic services in the form of tutoring and afterschool programs. The desires of the study participants illustrate the potential that exists within black churches to ease parents' burdens regarding academic success by providing assistance with school assignments and curricular concepts (Toldson, Ivory, & Anderson, 2010). Programs, such as direct tutorial services, provide an opportunity for church volunteers to interact with students and condition African American youth to achieve higher educational outcomes (Madyun & Witherspoon, 2010).

In addition to requesting more tutorial and afterschool programs, the participants in this study revealed their vision of possible school-church partnerships. A male from the Gospel Baptist Church youth focus-group shared:

I think they [black churches] should partner more with the schools. Like set up some games and projects instead of the school just doing it. The people from the church and community could go to it because the church would be actually helping with it like getting the students, getting supplies.

Pastor Daniel, the senior pastor at Worship Baptist Church, passionately shared a response that provided additional insight into possible school-church partnerships. When Pastor Daniel shared his response, I got the impression that, in his view, a function of the church could be to provide concerned and caring African Americans (specifically African American parents) who could sit on various educational committees to ensure that the needs of African American students are addressed in a proactive manner verses a responsive manner. Pastor Daniel stated:

I think that when you are talking about African American children and African American education, I think there has to be some parenting on the school board. There has to be representation in decision making as to how African American children are handled. Because culturally things are different – what effects one culture will not affect another. I think there ought to be some input from advisory groups other than the PTA. I think when it comes to decision and policies that African Americans should be sought and involved in those decisions rather than brought to them and said this is what you have to do.

In addition to addressing the potential role the black church has in ensuring that concerned African American adults are placed in positions that impact the educational decisions. Pastor Daniel shared that a component of effective school-church partnerships

would involve the schools offering programs at the church site. In order to achieve such programs, the members of the black church will have to be willing to allow the use of their church facilities. Pastor Daniel's comment is similar to a comment made by a male from Gospel Baptist Church youth-focus group that addressed the potential of school programs offered on the church's campus. Specifically, Pastor Daniel shared:

What if the school would underwrite some programs in the community, for example afterschool. I mean they have school programs now; but do [them] where the kids are. The people who are with them [the kids] could: (A) be trained; (B) reinforce what is in the school; and (C) report the progress back to the school. And it would not (A) be a burden on the school system; nor (B) would be an exclusion of the community where the kids live.

The black church goers who participated in this study demonstrated a passion that exemplifies the current, and more importantly potential, role the black church plays in addressing the academic needs of African American youth. Prior to conducting my study, I participated in a detail review of the literature which revealed that black churches have the resources to promote systemic change and have used these resources in the past to address social issues, such as education (Baldwin, 2003; Beyerlein & Andrews, 2008; Calhoun-Brown, 2003; Dunston, 1989; Fluker, 2003; Howard-Pitney, 2003; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The information shared by the study participants confirms the literature as well as provides insight into the passion black church goers have regarding the issue of African American student achievement. Whereas Table 3 provides a review of current programs and services that were offered by black church goers, Table 4, which is on the next page, provides a review of future endeavors black church goers said they are willing to pursue in their efforts to address the achievement of African American

youth. As previously stated, the passion in which the study participants shared their vision indicated to me that their top priority was to find ways in which the black church could directly promote student success.

**Table 4**

**Examples of Potential Programs and Services that could be Offered by the two Selected Black Churches**

<b>Boost Student Motivation</b>	<b>Celebrate Student Achievement</b>	<b>Promote Academic Success</b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal Tutorial Program</li> <li>• Collaborative Afterschool Programs with School District (Held in the Church Community)</li> <li>• Collaborative School Programs with School District (Held in the Church Community)</li> <li>• Academic Bowls</li> <li>• African American Parent Council</li> </ul>

The black church has always functioned as one of the most prominent institutions in black society (Gaines, 2010). The current and potential programs offered by black churches, such as those listed in Table 3 and Table 4, exemplifies how the black church of today is in a position to have an unprecedented impact on the black community, especially in regards to the academic achievement of African American youth.

Additionally, Table 3 and Table 4 provide a visual response to the first part of my second research question in that the tables clearly document the programs and services that are provided by black churches in their efforts to address the social and academic needs of African American school-aged youth. What remains to this second research question is



consideration of who is responsible for implementing black church services and programs, such as those highlighted in the two tables.

**Question 2b: Who is responsible for the work?**

The voices of study participants, review of relevant church documents, and researcher's observations overwhelming support the works of Gilkes (2001), Higginbotham (1993), and Wiggins (2005) and reveal that, although they are not typically in positions of leadership, black women are significant to the services and programs offered by black churches. As the researcher, I must admit that this phenomenon caused me to self-reflect on my own experiences as a black, female church goer. It also caused me to revisit the literature in search of stories from other black, female church goers who did not hold aspirations of church leadership, which is similar to my personal story and the stories shared by the black females in this study. I did discovered scholars, such as Anderson (2004), Goldman (1990), and Toinette (1995), whose work highlighted the powerful influence black women have in black churches, which this study's data also supports. What was clear to me was the paradox that exists between the patriarchal structured of black churches and the dependence the black church has on black female.

**The Elephant in the Room: Recognizing Women's Influence.** I observed that of all of my research questions, the question, "Are there any differences in the roles of male and female church members", seemed to bring up a level of discomfort in the three men who participated in individual interviews – all of whom had the titled of Pastor. When asked this question, I observed that the male pastors gave a long pause, would look

up into the air or around the room, and after a sigh would begin their response. I also observed that the cadence in which they responded to this question was much slower than the tempo used with other questions. It was as if they were virtually piecing their words together while trying to respond at the same time. I don't know if their discomfort was due to the fact that I was a woman asking the question; therefore, I must acknowledge that I am not sure if their response would have been different had I been a male. Pastor Daniel's, senior pastor at Worship Baptist Church, response to the question was as follows:

Well, I think there has always been a dichotomy not only in the church; but in our society as well. And what you have to understand is that the church is really just a microcosm of the community. Whatever happens in the church is really a result of whatever is happening in the community. If there is a problem with the kids in the home community they come to the church and so what is happened in our society and the African American community women have taken on a different role they have become single parents. They have had to do some things that in the past they did not have to do as much of. They have also gone in the workplace and in doing and so places more stress on them. So there is a different in our church we try to balance that by making sure women can function in any role that the church has to offer from deacons to elders to leaders to advisors to mentors and anything in that arena. So there is a different role and I think that should be because I think there are some things that men cannot do and I think there are some things that women cannot do.

Pastor Clarence's, senior pastor at Gospel Baptist Church, response was as follows:

Yes, they are and that's a good thing. We have women leaders and men leaders; but the things we try to do; we [men] try to be chivalry ... Our men, when ladies come up the steps and they are supposed to assist them [the ladies] and that's to be an example to our black males AND white males we have white males here at [named church] of trying to respect the woman. Our ladies are to speak to our young girls within the church if there's any problem and vice versa male to male. Our elders to talk to all of us and those roles with the biggest thing within the family the male is the head and that he rules over – not in a mean way – over his

wife and family; but he is just a leader. So we set up males to be leaders; but we also have female preachers here. And male preachers; but we understand in our mindset that we put the standard in our male leaders which helps our young men in their roles as leaders and to respect those ladies. And our ladies are happy for the most part to be submissive. But submissive doesn't mean that they are not leaders or strong and they understand that too. We respect the gifts that God has given us. I like my wife's tender skin and smile; I am glad she is a woman and not a male. The roles are different.

Pastor Albert's, Youth Pastor at Worship Baptist Church, responded:

I'll answer this with much discretion and grace. There are certain roles; just like society puts certain roles on the house as to what the husband should do; what the wife should do. I think there are certain duties and responsibilities that a man should do at church; there are certain responsibilities a woman should do at church. However, because more women go to church than men; on an everyday normal basis women come to worship more than men. Women are doing the male jobs when there is no male to do those jobs. Now, however to get to the base of your question, I think that the jobs that are there to be done; they all have to be done whether it be male or female. I do feel that God can use females just like he does males and God use males just like he does females. But I do think that there is a time and purpose for everything and that purpose should be done [by] who God intended for that purpose to be done by. But I will say that one thing I don't like about the African American churches – speaking from experience that the female in leadership has always been stigmatized to almost the point that they don't believe that females can be great leaders. However, I tend to disagree. You know just like, some people in African American denominations and organizations don't allow female pastors well that is something I whole heartedly disagree with because the first person to see Jesus when he came out of the womb was a female – she was the first that gave greetings before a male was; so I'm saying all of that to say that nowhere in the Bible does it say where females can't be great leaders. If females are great leaders outside church; females can be great leaders inside of church.

As indicated by all three responses – and as Anderson (2004) found – the patriarchal structure of society does influence and impact the structure of the church. The responses from Pastor Clarence and Pastor Daniel indicate that, as senior pastors, they support women in the pulpit. A review of relevant church documents indicates that at

both churches women hold positions of power and influence. For example, at Worship Baptist Church the governing body of the church, the Elders Council, is comprised of 10 members – 3 of whom are women. Gospel Baptist Church has two Associate Ministers – 1 of whom is a woman. A review of church documents further revealed that at both churches women serve in the capacity of ministry leader for several ministries that are instrumental to the services provided by the church to African American youth. For example, at Gospel Baptist Church, women lead the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Youth Choir, Youth Ministry, Youth Dance Ministry, Scholastic Committee, and Social Committee. There are three more officially recognized ministries at Gospel Baptist Church; all three are led or co-led by men.

At Worship Baptist Church, ministries are categorized into six areas addressing hospitality and customer service; event planning; evangelism and homelessness; volunteer and ministry support; church stability, and youth services. According church documents, there are approximately 36 ministries altogether at Worship Baptist Church and 18 are led by women. The ministries that fall under the umbrella of youth services and evangelism and homelessness are all led by women. Church documents conveyed that these ministries have been designed to “reach those who are outside the walls of the sanctuary”; therefore, the efforts of prophetic services that address the education needs of African American youth would rest heavily upon the shoulder of women.

Despite the fact that both churches have women in key leadership positions, there seems to be a paradox between the ability of a woman to be a leader and the traditional gender roles and responsibilities assigned to women due to the patriarchal structure of our

society. I think this paradox is primarily due to the fact that although in our patriarchal society men are supposed to be the leaders; in black churches the congregations are primarily female. Therefore, as stated by Pastor Albert, “Women are doing the male jobs when there is no male to do those jobs”. In traditional churches, such as the one Pastor Albert grew up in, male volunteers were typically assigned to deacon or steward positions or asked to do provide physical labor. Whereas female volunteers were typically asked to serve as Sunday school teachers, offer clerical skills, or assist with kitchen duties. Mae, a member of Gospel Baptist, shared the same sentiment as Pastor Daniel and stated, “Yeah, more women seem to volunteer faster than men. We need to find a way to get our men more involved with working with our youth”. Bernice from Gospel Baptist Church stated:

Yes, you want me to explain in my opinion. It’s interesting but in my church and I think that it’s the case in a lot of churches – other than the official board of deacons and the trustees females play a front seat role. It’s interesting – maybe not in big churches, mega churches; but in small middle churches – the membership seems to be made up of more females than males. But things have changed because we do have a few officials that are females we have female pastors, associate pastors; but I think historically it was recognized that the males would take the more out front roles. Because I can remember back when churches didn’t welcome female ministers into the pulpits in some denominations I guess that has changed and improved. At my church we do have female officials and some of the leaders and the advisors are females .... I think because we promote that idea of female role models and put females out front in the business role in education you have principals and administrators that are female so in the church I think the role has changed and more equity there I guess.

As highlighted by the voices of these two female study participants and according to Goldman (1990), black women have historically been and continue to be the backbone of the black church through their attendance, giving, and volunteering in a greater

proportion as compared to men. However, according to Barnes (2006), there are some scholars who argue that the only definitive definition of leadership in the black church is the position of lead pastor. I must acknowledge that after analyzing the data and reflecting on my own experience as a black, female church member; I found myself asking, “What truly defines leadership within the black church”. Is leadership defined solely in hierarchal terms as it relates to who is on top? Or, is leadership defined in terms of exploring who has the power to influence decision making? Based on researcher observations, the voices of study participants, my personal reflections, and according to Anderson (2004) and Toinette (1995), I have discovered that black women use many techniques to empower themselves within their black churches and have committed themselves to the survival of a group of people.

The power of black women in black churches is apparent in one key position, the First Lady. In most black churches, the title, “First Lady” is given to the senior pastor’s wife. Although, I did not interview the First Lady of either church I did observe that both of them hold extreme influence within their respective churches. Also, a review of relevant church artifacts documented the role that each First Lady plays within her respective church. For example, at Gospel Baptist Church, the First Lady Clarence (wife of Pastor Clarence) serves as co-leader of the Girl Scouts and Youth Dance Ministry. She is responsible for the coordination of social committee events as well as oversees some of the activities provided by the scholastic committee. During one of the observed services, Pastor Clarence acknowledged to the whole congregation that First Lady Clarence helps him with decision making; she is “his rock”. Likewise, at Worship Baptist Church, First

Lady Daniel (wife of Pastor Daniel) is highly revered by the congregation. She holds monthly “for women only” Bible studies. During one of the observed services, she came to the pulpit to address the congregation regarding the importance of family devotion and worship. Like Pastor Clarence, Pastor Daniel verbally announced the unwavering support and guidance he receives from his mate as well. Both First Lady Clarence and First Lady Daniel are formally educated and seem extremely knowledgeable about religious content. However, despite their level of education, biblical knowledge, and the admiration shown to them by congregation members, both First Ladies seem content, as stated by Pastor Clarence, in their “submissive” roles.

Like the First Ladies of their churches, the women who participated in this study (via individual interview) were formally educated women. Mae and Alicia hold Associate Degrees; Kerry, Sally, and Tracy hold Bachelor Degrees; and Bernice holds a Master’s Degree. All six ladies are active in their church; however, none of them shared with me any aspirations of wanting to be pastors. With the exception of Kerry, who was transitioning out of her ministry role, I observed that all ladies genuinely enjoyed talking about their roles in their various ministries and the impact they have on children and youth through their service to the church. This was evident by the smiles they expressed on their faces and the prideful stance of their postures when given the opportunity to talk about their personal work within their respective churches. It should also be noted that Kerry was excited about the work she had done; but she admitted that she was at a “bittersweet” time in her life because of the transition from the Youth Ministry. If we use these ladies and the First Ladies of their churches as an indicator regarding the level of

influence held by black women we begin to see that leadership within the black church should not be defined in terms of who is on top; but in terms of who truly has the power to influence decision making.

It should be noted that during my observations at both Gospel Baptist Church and Worship Baptist Church, I observed approximately 70% of the congregation was comprised of females. The amount of female church goers, coupled with the volunteer services that the female study participants provide to educational services and programs within their churches, indicate the significance of black women to black church activism.

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) state, “The survival of black churches is overwhelmingly indebted to the efforts and contributions of black women in the pews” (p. 308). Barnes (2006) reveals that because of the historical mistreatment of African American males, black women have been required to “stand by their man” in ways not required of their counterparts. In her effort to support the black male, as well as African American communities, the black female has had to supplant concerns of gender inequality for issues of racism (Anderson, 2004; Barnes, 2006; Gilkes, 2001; Toinette, 1995; Wiggins, 2005). Many black women understand that historically the only hierarchal role of leadership and power available to black men was that of black church pastor (Barnes, 2006). Such allegiance calls us to question the concept of “submissive” brought out in the comments of Pastor Clarence.

According to Anderson (2004) when trying to address patriarchal concepts in the black church, such as submissive, we have to ask ourselves: “To whom are black women subordinate?” In black churches are black women subordinate to God the father; to the



community; or to individual men? As I analyzed the data, I discovered the answer to all three of these questions is “Yes”. The joy expressed by the women who participated in this study (via individual interview) revealed to me that these women use their church service as a form of personally worship to God. They all seemed content with their level of involvement in church activities and the power each of them had within their ministries to influence the social and academic development of African American youth.. For example, Alicia, youth advisor leader from Worship Baptist, shared, “I sometimes get frustrated with all there is to do; but I enjoy working with the youth and making sure that they have all they need”.

Due to our nation’s history of racism, black women have had to be submissive to their community and set aside their own aspirations in order to better the community. During times of civic unrest, such as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the black church served as the center of operations and helped to bring to the forefront issues of racial inequality (Gaines, 2010). According to Anderson (2004), during these times, the male leaders of the black church were better equipped to serve as the leaders of the movement because male leadership aligned with the patriarchal structure of our society (i.e., the male leaders of the black church would be more accepted by the male leaders of other institutions). Anderson (2004) challenges us to imagine how successful the black church would have been during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s had black women refused to support and place males in visible roles of leadership – would white society had fostered a movement led by females, especially black females? In an effort to build up and support black men, black women have served in submissive

roles to black men. Therefore, it seems that at times, within the black church, black women creatively relinquish their power to black men because to do so supports black men and also enhances the community as a whole (Barnes, 2006). Only the individual woman knows the reasons why she chooses to suppress her own needs for the benefit of someone or something else. However, in the black church the actions of black women are intertwined with themes of race and gender. The intersection of race, gender, and community form the options available to black women to aid their communities through ways that make their faith meaningful to their personal relationship with their God.

The results of this study reveal that in black churches – black women are the worker bees; they are the backbone of the church. The women who participated in this study highlight how through their volunteer service, black women remain committed to the betterment of both the church and community. For example, as the leader of the Youth Dance Ministry (Gospel Baptist), Mae conducts weekly practices and makes herself available to emails and calls from parents; as the leader of the Youth Ministry (Gospel Baptist), Kerry attends most youth functions and coordinates Youth Ministry activities; and Alicia, as the leader of the Youth Advisory Team (Worship Baptist), attends all Youth Advisory Team meetings and assistance the youth pastor with the implementation of all youth activities. These three women highlight how black women provide countless hours of services that enhance the spiritual, social, and physical lives of those who participate in the ministries in which they lead.

In Chapter II, I discussed the significant role the black woman has to both the black family and black church. In their role as mothers, black women have firsthand

knowledge of the low teacher expectations and level of care available to African American students enrolled in today's public schools. Through their volunteer service to their black churches, black mothers are able to come together to encourage black churchgoers to implement and offer services and programs that connect students with caring adults and serve to counteract low teacher expectations. As discussed in Chapter II, in African Americans, the concept of family includes those to whom a biological link has been established as well as extended members without biological ties. Therefore, the term "mother" can be used to describe biological mothers, grandmothers, aunts, etc. as well as other female family members who are merely connected through a mutual desire for improved African American student performance. Senior church pastors seeking to implement educational services within the black church must acknowledge the significant role black women will play to the success of such programs. School leaders seeking to forge partnerships with black churches will need to understand that in black churches women hold extreme influence and will be instrumental to their efforts to form school-church partnerships. To further illustrate this point, I used church documents to create Table 5, which documents the services and programs listed in Table 3 that were coordinated or implemented by a woman. Table 5, which is on the next page, provides a visual representation of the significant role black females have in the services and programs offered by black churches.

**Table 5****Current Programs and Services that are Coordinated or Implemented by Black Women**

<b>Boost Student Motivation</b>	<b>Celebrate Student Achievement</b>	<b>Promote Academic Success</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Newsletter</li> <li>• Biblical Training</li> <li>• Black History Program</li> <li>• Back to School Event</li> <li>• Networking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honor Roll Recognition</li> <li>• Achievement Celebrations</li> <li>• Provide Scholarships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal Tutorial Services</li> <li>• After-School Program</li> <li>• Summer Enrichment Program</li> <li>• Leadership Training</li> <li>• Parent Meeting</li> <li>• Church Announcements</li> </ul>

Although they may not hold the senior pastor position, black women are leaders because collectively they hold resources, such as their volunteer services and their tithes and offerings, which represent real power and influence (Anderson, 2004). As stated by Wiggins (2005) black women hold and maintain power within the black church without the title of senior pastor; this was evident in the women who participated in the study and the researcher's observations of the role the First Lady had within each church. Therefore, the answer to the second part of my second research question is that black women are primarily responsible for the work aimed to socialize African American youth for school success. Without the title of senior or lead pastor, black women are able to collectively use their resources to aid their communities and serve as the unsung leaders of the black church. Therefore, black women will play a vital role in the creation,

implementation, and maintenance of programs and services that address the social and learning needs of African American youth.

### **Links to Conceptual Framework: Social Learning Theory**

People's actions and motivations are heavily influenced by their participation in religious fellowship; however, the role religion and faith is omitted from literature concerning school curricula (Toldson & Anderson, 2010). This gap in the literature inspired me to use the experiences of black church goers to examine how the black church is used to socialize children for public school success. Through observation, document review, and the views of the black church goers, in this study, I learned that black church goers' understanding of the negative impact race has on the student-teacher relation between African American students and public school teachers is used to provide motivation and modeling that aim to help African American youth maneuver through the public school system.

As Martin and McAdoo (2007) suggest, black churches have a responsibility to African American communities to transfer values and cultural beliefs that will enhance the community as a whole unit. This responsibility aligns with concepts found in Bandura's (1986) social learning theory. According to Bandura (1986), social learning theory "embraces an interactional model of causation in which environmental events, personal factors, and behavior all operate as interacting determinates of each other" (p. xi). Social learning theorists address how one obtains the values, beliefs, and actions viewed as appropriate for the system in which they live (Baron et al., 1997). From this study I learned that motivation and modeling are social learning techniques used by black

church goers to provided coded information that increases the social capital available to African American youth and therefore positively impact the youth's teaching and learning experiences (Al-Fadhil & Kersen, 2010, Bandura, 1986, Barrett, 2010; Dereli, 2009).

**Motivating Youth.** As significant social institutions, black churches share responsibility for providing motivation that will encourage and empower African American students to succeed in school. According to Bandura (1986), motivation is a cognitive modeling mechanism that can be used to produce desired outcomes. From what I observed, motivation was used by black church goers as a form of encouragement as well as to serve as a reminder of expected behavior and responsibilities. For example, on Youth Sunday, at Gospel Baptist Church the youth are encouraged to come to the pulpit to quote scriptures. The youth have been taught to memorize scriptures that will, as stated by Pastor Clarence, help them with their life challenges. During one of my observations, I observed that 15 youth ranging in age from approximately 3 to 17 came to the front to quote their scripture, which were self-selected. As the children quoted their scriptures, the adult church goers in the audience would say, "Amen" and would genuinely clap for each child. When some of the younger children seemed too shy, the church goers would provide positive comments, such as, "You can do it baby" or "Take your time". Also, adults who did not seem to be related to the children would come up with their Bibles and help the children with their scriptures. After the children and youth quoted their scriptures, Pastor Clarence reminded the congregation that it was imperative that the church took the time to "build up" the youth and "provide them with the word that will

encourage them through their life challenges”. During his interview, Pastor Clarence commented on the significance of the quoting of scripture by the youth:

I think one of the biggest ones [services conducted by the church] that we started here many years ago; it was actually here before [he came]. We have a teaching moment on the first Sunday for our kids. During that time, they do scriptures that help them in many ways: memorization, also public speaking. We’ve seen kids that literally couldn’t stand in front; who were afraid; some wouldn’t even come up. We’ve seen them blossom and be able to quote scriptures and talk very fluently. So, that when we break down those fears. We set up those standards here at church so we can reach out so that they can excel in school.

The way the adults supported this endeavor showed their acceptance and kinship with the youth; which, is a critical component of motivation (Bandura, 1986). Also, activities such as the public quoting of scripture, provides an opportunity for adult, black church goers to use motivation and encouragement to counteract the level of care available to African American students enrolled in public schools. The kinship made available to African American youth through their participation in black religion helps to build a network of caring adults who are attached to the student and show a level of high expectation and care (Toldson & Anderson, 2010).

The youth at Worship Baptist Church also provided insight into to the use of motivation. The information they shared revealed how the efforts of black church goers can be used as motivation that is linked to perceived power and status change, such as achievement (Bandura, 1986). For example, when asked if black churches should become involved with the educational needs of African American youth, one of the Worship Baptist youth focus-group participants stated:

I think they [the black church] should encourage us to do better in school because if you have the motivation to do good in school you will. Acknowledge us when we do good in school. Offer us incentives like they do in school. I think our church [Worship Baptist] does a good job sometimes because I was in the little honor roll awards and that helped me to want to do better. It made me feel happy. It encourages the ones who didn't make it.

The views of this youth participant highlights how black churches can and do provide activities that motivate youth by tying into the human need for power and status (Bandura, 1986). Activities, such as the Honor Roll Recognition, provide an opportunity for adult, black church goers to directly contradict the low expectations they feel public school educators have set for African American youth. Such programs send a direct message to youth, black church goers that academic excellence is the expectation and high achievement will be rewarded and recognized within the black church.

Based on what I observed and the views of some of the participants who participated in this study, I have concluded that motivation is used by black church goers to socialize African American youth for public school (and community) success. The types of motivations that were highlighted in this study aligned to what Bandura (1986) described as the human need for social acceptance and belonging as well as the need for power and status. One of the male participants from the parent focus-group stated, "I believe that the youth are looking for you know searching for something or someone to cling to; to help encourage and just also to be there to care". During her individual interview, Bernice stated:

But what we [the adult volunteers for the Youth Choir] always try to do when we meet we try to give I guess words of encouragement; but to be supportive in



saying to them that you know we are proud of you we ask you to continue to make good choices to do the right things in school.

Adult, black church goers provide motivation to counter the low level of care they perceive is available to African American youth enrolled in public schools. They also provide motivation to counter the low expectations they perceive public educators hold for African American students. Adult, black church goers understand that African American youth need adults who are willing to show care and concern.

**Modeling for Youth.** According to Bandura (1986), modeling is important for diffusing ideas, values, and styles of conduct within a social group. Most human behavior is learned by observation through modeling. By observing the actions of others, individuals can form rules of behavior, which is transferred into coded information (Bandura, 1986). Dereli (2009) also explains that adults in students' lives can model behaviors that demonstrate educationally accepted pro-social skills. When I started this study I knew it would be imperative that I kept my senses attuned to opportunities that allowed youth to just simply observe (i.e., be in the presence of) adults who were trying to model (physically or verbally) appropriate actions and reactions to various challenges African American youth may face. As a result of this study, I discovered that most modeling is done to increase student achievement as well as create a positive black identity. For example, Sally, a member of Gospel Baptist Church, shared:

We ask them [youth church goers] often, "Are you having issues in school?" We [adults in the Youth Ministry] want to know what the problem is so we can match them with someone who can help them with the issue by providing guidance and just someone to talk to.

Sally's response highlights the importance of just "being there". Her response also provides insight into how black churches can use networking to help students gain civic and educational skills (Al-Fadhil & Kersen, 2010). Her statement shows that at Gospel Baptist Church, some adult church goers try to be intentional with their interactions with youth. A youth participant from Gospel Baptist Church shared how adult members have helped her with her potential career choice and how the connections she has been able to make needs to be made available to all of her peers:

I think it would be good. I mean a lot of people, even here [Gospel Baptist Church], have gone to college and have done things. It would be really good to actually show us around and tell us, "This is how we got here" and "This is what we had to do". I think that would be good. I know I have connected with a few in the career I want to choose.

A male from the parent focus-group added:

We have at this church [Gospel Baptist Church] a lot of intelligent people that I'm just learning about that could help my children. I think that if we are going to hold our children accountable to a certain standard I think in some ways that we need to start putting [in] a certain structure.

Although some of the adult church goers at Gospel Baptist have been intentional in their efforts to network with youth; not all parents are aware of such interactions. However, the information shared from study participants does serve to inform that an action as simple as sharing ones career can provide the modeling and guidance African American youth need to succeed in today's public schools as well as in society.

**The Development of Coded Information.** The black church is a social institution that is essential to the development of social capital in African American youth

(Al-Fadhil & Kersen, 2010). Social capital focuses on the building of social networks that bond people together with like attributes in an effort to build chasms between diverse groups (Al-Fadhil & Kersen, 2010; Barrett, 2010). When it comes to black churches, the opportunities for networking and community building help to form attitudes and behaviors that create a set of socially learned skills that are conducive to both educational outcomes and the betterment of the African American community (i.e., creating habitus), which relates to the formation of coded information discussed in Chapter II (Barrett, 2010). As a reminder, according to social learning theorist, coded information refers to the rules of behavior individuals develop in order to successfully function within social environments (Bandura, 1986). Tracy, a member of Worship Baptist Church, provided a response that demonstrates how educational services and programs offered by black churches can help students form coded information that increases their social capital. She stated, “It [black church involvement with education] allows the churches to become role models of their own race”. A male participant from the parent focus-group conducted at Gospel Baptist Church also highlighted need to provide more societal accepted role models to today’s African American youth. Specifically, he stated:

They’re [African American youth] are trying to dress like them [some rap artist] with their sagging pants and doo rags and depict what their [some rap artist] image is. So why not have the church serve or be that symbol role model for the youth or have an opportunity for them to come to the church and be involved in something positive.

As previously explained, social capital can be defined as the ability an individual has to use social institutions, such as black churches, to build a habitus (Barrett, 2010).

Through his examination of various studies, Barrett (2010) discovered that black churches contributed significantly to the development of social capital in African American youth. The voices of the participants who participated in this study provide some insight into how just being in the presence of caring adults can increase social capital because the adults can provide reinforcements and/or punishments that help students learn to avoid antisocial behaviors (Dereli, 2009). In black churches, modeling is used to build social capital in a variety of ways ranging from providing insight into careers to projecting images that are more acceptable in society than the images African American youth may be bombarded with on televised media.

Through this case study, I have discovered that the black church goers use both motivation and modeling to create a system that encourages African American youth to succeed in their public schools as well as in their communities. The motivation offered to African American youth via the adult, black church goers is an extrinsic form of motivation that aims to address the human need for acceptance and belonging as well as the human need for power and status (Bandura, 1986). Black church goers provide opportunities for modeling that place African American youth in the presence of African American role models who have skills and information that serve to increase the social capital available to African American youth. Therefore, as it relates to my second research question, black church goers, who are primarily female, use modeling and motivation to increase the social capital available to African American students, which can positively affect the social and academic skills of African American youth.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

Social learning theorists believe that participation in social systems, such as black churches, helps people develop the skills and talents needed to be successful in larger social institutions, such as public schools (Sparks, 2011). By participating in services offered by black churches, African American youth are able to learn and observe skills that will empower them to succeed in public school (Baron et al., 1997; Barrett, 2010; Dereli, 2009; Turner & Killian, 1993; Yosso, 2005). Motivational actions, such as honor roll recognition services, help to eliminate the previously discussed discourse of deficit and create a discourse of potential, which will acknowledge the talents and strengths of African American youth (Powell Pruitt, 2004). When adult, black churchgoers use social learning techniques, such as modeling and motivation, they empower African American youth to see themselves through a lens of potential, which can build a positive self-image and beliefs that form coded information that leads to an increase in social capital (Barrett, 2010). According to Barrett (2010), an increase in social capital can translate into public school success; therefore, the participants of this study have helped to reveal that the use of modeling and motivation by adult, black churchgoers is used to address the social and academic needs of African American school-aged youth.

From the voices of study participants, researcher's observations, and a review of relevant church documents I was able to confirm the salience of the information contained in the literature reviewed in Chapter II. Black churchgoers are motivated by race to provide services and programs they feel counteract low teacher expectations and connect African American youth to caring adults; while also, increasing an African

American student's ability to use coded information to successful transition through the public school system. In their roles as both black mothers and black church goers, black women are instrumental to the implementation of services and programs offered by black churches that aim to socialize African American youth for public school success.

Although, they may not hold the position of senior or lead pastor, black women's commitment to the black church is vital to the overall success of the black church and the services and programs offered by the black church. .

In the next, and final, chapter, I will discuss how current and potential services and programs offered by the two selected black churches can be used to examine the prevalence of prophetic activism. Using the services and programs contained in these two tables, I will look at the conditions that cause a service of program to become prophetic. Understanding the conditions that foster prophetic activism will be beneficial to both school leaders and black church leaders in the efforts to forge school-church partnerships. .

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND BLACK CHURCH LEADERSHIP**

Understanding that schools are experiencing intense pressure to promote academic achievement; school leaders need to reach out to the communities in which they are anchored to form school-community partnerships that address the social, emotional, and cognitive skills needed for global citizenry. The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which black church goes socialize African American youth for success in today's public schools. It is the intent of the study to provide information to school leaders that highlight the black church as a readily available community resource prepared to help address the academic needs of African American youth. The historical role of the black church during the period of the U.S. Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s serve to highlight the ability black church goes have to organize and work together to address spiritual development and worldly affairs (Baldwin, 2003; Higginbotham, 1993; Swarts, 2008).

#### **The Potential for School-Church Collaborations**

This study serves to inform school leaders and educators of the richness that can be found within their local black churches. Through the voices of study participants, researcher's observations, and a review of church documents this study illustrates how adult, black

church goers use their understanding of race to provide modeling and motivation that enhances the social capital of youth, black church goers as well as other youth in African American communities. Such opportunities for socialization improve academic proficiency, provide opportunities for youth to show respect for self and others, and enhance individual responsibility – these traits align with pro-social behaviors accepted in many public school settings (Aird, 2002; Crenshaw et.al, 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Durlak & Weissberg, 2010; Karenga & Karenga, 2007).

Although some school leaders may be reluctant to form school-church partnerships, the federal government, through current policies, acknowledges and supports faith-based partnerships. According to Ryden (2003), “the provision of the 1996 welfare legislation known as Charitable Choice aimed to clarify church-state relations in the realm of social service delivery and encourage government solicitation of faith-based organizations in administering social services” (p. 248). As a result of this legislation, policymakers have become open to faith-based participation in various social programs ranging from adoption to substance abuse rehabilitation (Ryden, 2003). Furthermore, on November 17, 2010, President Barack Obama signed an executive order that readdressed government and faith-based partnerships (Associated Press, 2010). The executive order signed by President Obama is intended to strengthen and clarify the “legal footing of the government’s relationship with faith-based organizations” and underscore the “important role of these organizations in serving individuals, families and communities in need” (Associated Press, 2010). The Charitable Choice legislation provides an example of the



government's commitment to include places of worship in solutions that aim to address current social problems.

With the passage of legislation that focuses on faith-based activism the government has addressed the need to find solutions for social problems in places not attached to government rule (i.e., to find solutions outside of government). However, in the field of education, many school leaders are concerned over the legal and constitutional dimensions of state-religious partnerships (Ryden, 2003). In their view, Establishment Clause guidelines found in the U.S. Constitution are filled with ambiguities that prevent a more definitive answer as to whether the Constitution allows public funding for secular programs that are delivered via religious organizations that might incidentally advance or involve religion in the process (Ryden, 2003, Zalot, 2003). Today's school leaders must understand that in current policies, such as the Charitable Choice, law makers have acknowledged the importance of faith-based activism as a means of addressing social problems. The history of the black church provides examples that illustrate the black church's ability to collectively engage in community development in an effort to improve the physical, economic, and social conditions of African American citizens without focusing on religious advancement (Baxter, 2001; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Owens, 2003). Public school leaders are encouraged to dismiss fears over the separation of church and state so that these fears do not override the need to use appropriate resources to address the academic needs of African American students. Concerns regarding the separation of church and state can be addressed by the school leader with detailed communication that provides the guidelines as to how black church

goers can involve themselves in and with the public school (Pedescleaux, 2003; Price, 2008; Wynn, 2012). As school leaders look for effective resources that can be used to address the academic needs of African American students, the resources found within the black church have the potential to promote positive change in African American student achievement.

As discussed in Chapter V, adult, black church goers, who are primarily women, use their understanding of the intersection of race and student achievement to provide motivation and modeling that addresses the social and academic needs of African American youth. As a result of this study I discovered that black church goers are currently providing services and programs to African American youth and have a desire to implement additional services and programs. The information that will be discussed in this chapter provides an answer to my third, and final, research question, which is, “How can the efforts of black churches inform education leaders in developing faith-based partnerships with black churches”. I will answer this question by outlining how educators played a key role in the ability of the selected black churches to offer prophetic services and programs that extend beyond the walls of the church. First, though, I will elaborate on the conditions that foster prophetic activism.

### **Conditions Needed for Black Church Activism**

As discussed in Chapter II, black churches have a history in social activism. However, it seems that the black church has been silent on issues of social oppression, such as the underachievement of African American students in today’s public schools. If the black church of today is to become active on such social issues there has to be a

discussion of the conditions that foster and build social activism. McDaniel's (2008) four conditions for political activism will be used to demonstrate how the data from this study can inform future school-church partnerships. According to McDaniel (2008), a black church becomes politically active when four conditions are met: (1) the church leader is interested in involving the church in community issues; (2) the church itself is not restricted from having a presence in community matters (i.e., church by-laws); (3) the church members are receptive to the idea of having the church involved in community concerns and (4) the current social climate both necessitates and allows church involvement. I will use these four conditions to illustrate what my study discloses about black church activism.

I will begin with McDaniel's (2008) fourth condition and work backwards to address all four. However, before addressing McDaniel's (2008) four conditions, I need to address assumptions that are embedded within his four points. Like the male scholars discussed in Chapter II (i.e., Du Bois, Woodson, and Mays), McDaniel's first condition assumes that church leadership is defined in terms of the one person (more than likely male) who holds the top position of senior pastor. However, as uncovered in Chapter V, contemporary views of black church leadership must also acknowledge the power black women have within the church to influence discussion making. Therefore, the church members McDaniel's (2008) refers to in his third point are more than likely to be females who must be willing to support the initiative through the resources they donate to the church (i.e., tithes and their time). Although McDaniel (2008) refers to a single church leader, as discussed in Chapter V, in many black churches, leadership must be viewed

through a lens that acknowledges the contributions of all congregants, especially black women. Within many black churches the senior pastor may hold the top position; but the success of the church is dependent upon the pastor's vision and the willingness of the congregation to support the vision through their tithes, offerings, and other volunteer services.

**Condition 4: The current social climate both necessitates and allows church involvement.** As stated in Chapter I, the data collected for the school district in which the two black churches selected for this study are located aligns with national trends and provided the bases for my argument that the education of African Americans attending this public school district is in a crisis state and must be addressed. Although in this school district, black and white students comprise a similar population – both roughly at forty percent; in all areas of school success, the achievement of white students exceeds that of black students (OSS, 2008; OSS, 2009). The urgency of addressing the current academic status of African American students may force some school leaders to look solely on resources located within the school building or school system structure (Barton, 2004). However, Madyun and Witherspoon (2010) remind us that the underachievement of African American students in today's public schools is call to black churches to return to their historic role of civic engagement and fight for social justice. Therefore, this study was needed to reveal to both school leaders and black church leaders the current and potential practices used by black church goers that address the academic achievement of African American youth.

In Chapter IV, I pinpointed the data from this study to highlight how black church goers attributed the poor teaching and learning opportunities available to African American students to the negative impact race has on the student-teacher relationship between African American students and public school teachers. For example, Pastor Daniel, senior pastor at Worship Baptist Church, stated, “Well I think race adversely affects it [academic performance of African American youth]. Number one, we have more females [teachers] who may be intimidated by the presence of African American males”. Additionally, views from study participants address the historic role of the black church as it relates to the socialization the black church has made available to African American youth. For example, study participant, Bernice, who is a member of Gospel Baptist Church, provided a statement that highlights how the church provided “villagers” who were concerned about the needs of the youth. Bernice stated, “...as I look back, we were limited in my generation; but we were surrounded by villagers, in the church, who were always enriching us; who were always teaching us”. Bernice’s statement illustrates the reciprocal relationship that exists between African American communities and black churches. Overall, Black church goers’ understanding of race and the historical role of the black church, coupled with data from the local school district reveals that the current climate of our public schools necessitates the involvement of an out-of-the-school resource, such as the black church.

**Condition 3: The church members are receptive to the idea of having the church involved in community concerns.** As revealed in the previous chapter, and documented in Table 3, the selected black churches have devoted resources to provide

services and programs that address the academic needs of youth, church goers. The services and programs documented in Table 3 showcase how the study participants were indeed receptive to the idea of having the church involved in community concerns, specifically concerns centering on the academic needs of African American youth. For the black church leader, the list provides examples of programs and services that could be immediately implemented that address the student achievement of African American youth. Most of the programs require little resources; however, as I discussed in Chapter V, black church goers are willing to provide financial support to services and programs that are supported by the shared vision of the senior pastor and congregants.

**Condition 2: The church itself is not restricted from having a presence in community matters.** A review of church documents revealed that both Gospel Baptist Church and Worship Baptist Church have committed services to the community at-large. For example, Worship Baptist Church has a ministry that addresses homelessness. Through this ministry, during the winter months, the church serves as an emergency shelter and throughout the year hosts events where food, clothing, and toiletries are provided to local homeless shelters. In addition to the homeless ministry, Worship Baptist Church collaborates with other community agencies to provide a summer festival, which provides school supplies, clothing, and food to anyone who attends the festival. Similar to Worship Baptist Church, the members of Gospel Baptist Church conduct activities that showcase their presence in the community. For example, the church hosts a Hallelujah Night, which is similar to a fall festival, that provides food, candy, games, and horse-back rides to community members seeking an alternative to Trick-or-Treating. The church also

has a food pantry and provides food to anyone who contacts the church with a need.

Although, I was not able to view the by-laws of either church; from the examples contained in the relevant church documents it appears that neither church is restricted from having a presence in the community. Therefore, I assume that neither church is bounded by rules or policy that would prevent the allocation of resources (both human and financial) to endeavors that address the educational needs of African American students.

**Condition 1: The church leader is interested in involving the church in community issues.** During their interviews, each senior pastor provided information that serve to showcase their commitment not only to community issues; but as it relates to this study, educational issues as well. When asked is if black churches should become involved with the academic needs of African American youth attending public schools, Pastor Daniel, senior pastor at Worship Baptist Church, responded:

Unequivally yes and the reason that they [black churches] should be involved is that religion is a part of life. It is a part of your education. What we learn in other arenas we reinforce it or take away from it when we come to worship. Worship either enhances one's education or it causes it to be not effective. The church should be involved because: (1) in the church it is not only a social arena; but a moral arena. If your morals are out of place then how you apply your education either becomes skewed or null effect.

Pastor Clarence, senior pastor at Gospel Baptist Church, provided a similar response.

Additionally, he provided insight into a reason why some black church leaders may be hesitant to form partnerships with public schools. Specifically, Pastor Clarence stated:

I think we [black churches] should. I think the church has to be careful how they get involved. It has to be at the church's terms and not the world's terms or the outside. My concern is that the public sector may try to influence our thoughts and patterns, such as homosexuality, and, you know, how we raise our children. So, I think we should be [an] impact; but we've gotta' be able to set up standards for ourselves...

Although the literature revealed that some school leaders are concerned over the legal and constitutional dimensions of state-religious partnerships, the comment from Pastor Clarence reveals that some black church leaders may have similar concerns. However, it is important that I restate that through laws, such as Charitable Choice, law makers have acknowledged the importance of faith-based activism as a means of addressing social problems (Ryden, 2003; Zalot, 2003). Pastor Clarence's comment serves to remind both school leaders and black church leaders that communication must be established that provides detailed guidelines as how the black church can address student achievement within secular settings, such as public schools (Pedescleaux, 2003; Price, 2008; Wynn, 2012). Although, Pastor Clarence expressed hesitation with school-church partnerships, his church, Gospel Baptist Church, has a program, which will be highlighted later, that is open to teens that have been suspended from school and is held on the church's campus. Although Pastor Clarence vocalized concerns regarding school-church partnerships, he has actively supported such collaboration by allowing church facilities to be used by the local school district. Pastor Clarence's comments highlight how school leaders and black church leaders seeking to form school-church partnerships need to be honest about their own hesitations and bias. School leaders and black church



leaders must be willing to participate in authentic dialogue to address their hesitations and bias; such dialogue will lead to productive partnerships. (Wynn, 2012)

Overall, through this case study's data, I have discovered that the selected churches were positioned to become politically active in the educational needs of African American students enrolled in the local school district. The data indicates that black church leaders reading this study can assume that their black church is also ready for a school-church partnerships if it can be confirmed that: (1) the senior pastor supports educational initiative; (2) the church does not have written rules against such partnerships; (3) the church has volunteers who are able to implement educational programs, and (4) the data from the local school district warrants the involvement of an out-of-the-school resource, such as the black church.

McDaniel's (2008) four points also prove to be relevant to school leaders seeking to forge school-church partnerships. School leaders seeking to form a partnership with a black church will need to conduct research to determine: (1) the level of support the senior pastor and the congregation is likely to give to a school-church partnership; (2) the black church's previous involvement with social issues; (3) the level of commitment black church goers are likely to give to the initiative; and (4) how the school data supports the need for a school-church partnership. In addition to these four considerations, there is one more piece of information needed by a school leader. School leaders seeking to form a school-church partnership, must also gather information regarding the black church's efforts to be prophetic in the services they provide to the African American community.

### **Links to Conceptual Framework: Prophetic Activism**

Black churchgoers have a common understanding of the Christian faith and its implications for addressing both human need and inequality. These individuals have historically used their service to their church as a means of challenging the status quo of a racial hegemonic society (Baldwin, 2003; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Calhoun-Brown, 2003). According to Baldwin (2003), historically black church leaders and congregation members have acted on a belief that religion and morality should play some role in social settings, such as public schools. McRoberts (2003) explains that black church activism refers to “very extroverted forms of religious presence – forms that somehow benefit not only congregation members but people who do not belong to the church” (p. 100). As I discussed in Chapter II, McRoberts (2003) has identified three types of black church activism: (1) Priestly activism; (2) Pastoral activism; and (3) Prophetic activism. As a reminder, priestly activism refers to an exclusive “member only” ideology when it comes to the distribution of resources meaning that church membership is a requirement for participation in any program offered by the church. Pastoral activism refers to an ideology that recognizes the need to use church resources to assist both church and non-church members, meaning that church membership is not a prerequisite to benefit from church services. Still, church attendance (rather than membership) determines who will be able to benefit from services and programs offered by the church. Finally, prophetic activism refers to an ideology that focuses on the requirement of the black church to be of benefit to the whole community. This means that neither church membership nor church

attendance has an impact on the allocation of resources. The highest and most transformative form of church activism is prophetic activism.

In agreement with Howard-Piney (2003), I feel that one of the relevant features of black religion is the ability black religion has to take on prophetic services. Therefore, when I began this study I was hopeful that, due to their reputations, I would confirm that the two churches selected for this study were 21<sup>st</sup> century examples of prophetic services devoted to African American student achievement. However, what I discovered is that, although I am able to document actions from both churches that are prophetic in nature, both churches are at the level of pastoral activism overall. I am not disappointed in this finding; it has challenged me to investigate what causes one action to take on a prophetic nature while another action –from the same church— takes on a pastoral nature. What I discovered, and will highlight later, is that in order for a black church program or service to be prophetic in the realm of education, the program/service was initiated and/or inspired by an educator. Based on McRoberts (2003) definition of priestly activism, none of the services and programs documented through this study could be consider priestly in nature because church membership (i.e., “members only”) was not a prerequisite for any of the current services and programs documented in Table 3 or the potential services and programs documented in Table 4.

I will begin my discussion of prophetic activism by first refocusing on the types of services and programs that are currently implemented in the black churches that participated in this study. Most of the programs highlighted in Table 3 are examples of pastoral activism. Although most of these programs were not limited to “members only,”

they did not extend beyond the walls of the church to be considered prophetic. Most of the programs in Table 3 only benefited the church participants who were aware of their existence. Church membership was not a formal prerequisite for participation; however, church attendance was informally needed. Since both churches have a method for reaching those who do not physically attend (i.e., audio recordings of church service), church attendance should be viewed in terms of both physical and virtual attendance. African American youth who did not regularly participate in church service or who had sporadic participation may not have known about the services and programs listed in Table 3.

However, three services and programs listed in Table 3 are examples of prophetic activism: the Lunch Buddies program, the support provided to local athletic and academic programs, and direct donations are examples. These three programs impacted the community as a whole, not just the church congregation. Actually, church resources were used to support these events without documentation or proof that the implementation of these events would directly benefit church goers who regularly attended the church at all. Like the College Fair and anti-suspension program that will be discussed later, these three services were implemented because of an educator.

During his interview, Pastor Daniel, senior pastor at Worship Baptist Church, shared that principals from local schools contacted the church to seek ways in which the church could help their schools. As a result of the principals' contact, the church provided resources to support the local schools. Although I did ask Pastor Daniel to provide clarification as to who initiated the programs, I failed to ask him if the principals had any

ties to the church. I must acknowledge this because, when the senior pastor is able to yield his or her power to the educators in his or her congregation the black church is able to implement dynamic services and programs that address the educational needs of youth in community (McCray et al., 2010). This was evident in the two forms of prophetic activism documented at these two churches.

As I explained in Chapter III, Gospel Baptist Church was purposefully selected to participate in this study because the church had a reputation of being active in the community and had just recently collaborated with the local school district to implement an anti-suspension program. The anti-suspension program was designed to provide a place, outside of the public school, where suspended students could come to stay current with all school assignments. When asked about the program, Pastor Clarence shared:

We have the [named the program] that we connected with [named school] and the principal of [named school] just happens to be one of our members. He approached me about the program when he heard that the school system would provide a grant. He knew the program would benefit the students that attend his school... The [named program] is offered to everyone who goes to [named school] and finds themselves in that predicament [suspended from school].

Prior to the start of our interview, I spent time with Kerry, youth director at Gospel Baptist Church, explaining the purpose of my study and developing a rapport with her. During this time she shared with me that the students from the local high school are allowed to come to the church and work with an adult who will help them stay current with their school work while they are suspended. Kerry shared that the grant provided by the school district allotted for one full-time position and one part-time position; the church provided volunteers to supplement the schedules. In addition to volunteers, the

church also provided the facility and utilities free of charge. Like Kerry, Sally, former youth director at Gospel Baptist Church, did not mention the anti-suspension program during her interview; but she too spoke highly of the program during our pre-interview conversation. However, during her interview, Bernice, youth choir director at Gospel Baptist Church, had this to say about the program:

We have the [named the program] partnership with [named the school district]. Even though I had some mixed feelings about it; one side of my feelings said that if you went to school and behave you didn't need to come you need to go there [school] and do what you are supposed to do and make good choices and then you wouldn't have to come to such a program. And I know the disparity among people and it was interesting because I would go and visit [the students in the program] and some of my former 1<sup>st</sup> grade students would be there and they would always be kinda' hanging their head and I would say, "Why are you here" and they would have varied answers and their side of the story was that they were not treated fairly in that classroom and some of that I accepted because I know that in their perspective there were some inequities there and all of it, some of it, in my opinion was because they were bored; they were not being challenged – why not challenge our students? Teaching black children is not a remedial position.

Bernice later added:

... I was reading the article in the paper where they were saying, about 2 weeks ago, the suspension rate has improved in [named the school district] and the system had put some things in place to help that.

Although Mae, member at Gospel Baptist, did not mention the anti-suspension program, I must note that she was the one who initially told me of Gospel Baptist Church's role in the program. She spoke highly of the program and told me that it should be a part of my study. In addition to Mae's recommendation, other educators in the school district also highlighted Gospel Baptist Church's efforts to support the anti-suspension program.

Although Mae is no longer with us, I would like to thank her for the recommendation and the value she added to this study.

The anti-suspension program held at Gospel Baptist Church can be considered a form of prophetic black church activism. As suggested by McRoberts (2003) the intent of the anti-suspension program was to better the whole community not just be of benefit to the church and non-church members who regularly attended Gospel Baptist Church. Additionally, scholars such as Lincoln & Mamiya (1990) would argue that the anti-suspension program is considered a form of prophetic activism in that the church sought to address the social injustice of the high suspension rate of African American youth and sought to implement a solution that would positively impact the teaching and learning experiences of African American youth in the church's community at large. Through shared leadership, the senior pastor and black church goers of this church committed resources to the anti-suspension program without evidence that the program would directly benefit youth who are members of or regularly attend the church. Although, the anti-suspension program is a wonderful example of prophetic black church activism that addresses the education needs of African American youth; the program would not have existed at this church had it not been for an educator who brought the need to the attention of the senior pastor.

It should be noted that due to funding, the anti-suspension program was in a hiatus during the time I conducted my study at Gospel Baptist Church. Therefore, I was unable to speak with anyone outside of the church who was directly connected to the program regarding their views of the success of the program. However, when I contacted

the principal who initiated the partnership he stated that the program did provide assistance to his students who had to be suspended because of documented violations of the district's Student Code of Conduct. Due to various schedule conflicts, this principal and I were unable to meet for an interview. However, the information provided by other members of Gospel Baptist Church provided insight into the church's prophetic activism as it related to the anti-suspension program.

As with Gospel Baptist Church, the one example of prophetic activism I witness at Worship Baptist Church was initiated by an educator, in this case a school counselor. Although, the church had a reputation of being active with the local school district and provided a mentoring program, at the time of my study, the mentoring program had been temporarily suspended due to the appointment of the new youth pastor, Pastor Albert. However, thanks to patience and persistence, I was afforded the opportunity to witness a dynamic act of prophetic activism.

During the observed Youth Advisors Meeting, the advisors discussed their plans for an upcoming youth conference. As a part of those discussions, a school counselor, who is on the team, suggested that the church sponsor a College Fair. His idea was immediately accepted by the team and Pastor Albert stated that the church would support him as he organized the College Fair. I attended a follow-up meeting regarding the College Fair. At this meeting I learned that, through the efforts of the school counselor, the church had secured 60 colleges and universities to attend the College Fair. Also, Pastor Albert, youth pastor, shared that Pastor Daniel, the senior pastor, was excited about the College Fair and wanted the event to be a success for the church and the



community. To that end the church committed resources to run advertisements on local radio stations and secured publicity on local news stations as well. In addition to the advertisements and news publicity, the church contacted the local school system, which sent an electronic announcement to parents contained in one of the district's electronic databases. Also, funding was allocated to provide refreshments and dinner for all college recruiters. On the day of the event, 58 colleges and universities were represented and approximately 2000 people of various ethnicities were in attendance – this number includes adults and children.

The College Fair hosted by Worship Baptist Church is an example of prophetic activism. The event was intentionally created and implemented to address an education need, which was to make sure that African American youth had the opportunity to be exposed to institutions of higher learning. The counselor who presented the College Fair concept to the youth advisory panel felt that the church needed to play a role in what he felt was a crisis in the African American community. In his opinion, African American youth were not provided opportunities to interact with admission counselors from colleges and universities and this negatively impacted the ability of African American youth to fully understand the benefits of higher education. From the inception of the College Fair the intent was to reach out into the community. The church used available resources to ensure that at-large members of the community were informed of the event. Although, the youth advisors had hoped that youth who regularly attended the church would be in attendance; the church committed funds to this event without any assurances that youth connected to the church would have a direct benefit. Had the school counselor

not vocalized his desire to host the College Fair; this church would have missed this opportunity.

The anti-suspension program and the College Fair are examples of prophetic activism because the programs were created with the intention of reaching beyond the walls of the church in an effort to better the community at large. In addition to these two programs, and as previously discussed, there were other examples of prophetic activism. Table 6 categorizes the current and potential services and programs offered, or that could be offered, by black church into the levels of activism defined by McRoberts (2003).

**Table 6**

**Black Church Activism as it Relates to Education**

<b>Priestly</b> Church Member Centered	<b>Pastoral</b> Focus on Black Church Goers (including non-members)	<b>Prophetic</b> Community Focused
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Incentives</b></li> <li>• <b>Youth Newsletter</b></li> <li>• <b>Biblical Training</b></li> <li>• <b>Mentoring</b></li> <li>• <b>Black History Program</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Anti-Suspension Program</b></li> <li>• <b>College Fair</b></li> <li>• <b>Lunch Buddies</b></li> <li>• <b>Support local Athletic and Academic Programs</b></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Youth Pastor Visits to Schools (e.g., “Real Talk Sessions”)</b></li> <li>• <b>Back to School Event</b></li> <li>• <b>Honor Roll Recognition</b></li> <li>• <b>Achievement Celebrations</b></li> <li>• Tutorial Programs</li> <li>• <b>SAT Prep</b></li> <li>• <b>After-School Program*</b></li> <li>• <b>Scholarships</b></li> <li>• <b>Summer Enrichment Program*</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Direct Donations (e.g., purchase of computers for local school)</b></li> <li>• Collaborative Afterschool Programs with School District (Held in the Church Community)</li> </ul>

**Table 6 Continued:**

<b>Priestly</b> Church Member Centered	<b>Pastoral</b> Focus on Black Church Goers (including non-members)	<b>Prophetic</b> Community Focused
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Leadership Training</b></li> <li>• <b>Parent Meeting</b></li> <li>• <b>Church Announcements</b></li> <li>• Academic Bowls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative School Programs with School District (Held in the Church Community)</li> <li>• African American Parent Council</li> </ul>

Note: The items marked with an asterisk are paid programs that are available to any member of the community for a fee. However, the resources that the church commits to those programs benefit all youth who regularly attend services and programs offered by the church.

Note: The items appearing in bold print are the **current programs and services** that were highlighted in this study.

Tutorial services was placed in the pastoral activism column because study participants gave me the impression that their primary need for tutoring was to address the youth, church goers who were regular church participants. The potential for collaborative afterschool and district programs and the African American parent council were placed in the prophetic column because the implementation of such programs more than likely will require educator intervention and successful implementation will benefit African American youth and their families within the whole community; not just those who attend the church.

There are three key differences between the pastoral and prophetic examples documented in Table 6. The first difference is that the examples listed in the prophetic column currently, or have the potential to, impact youth in the church and extend beyond the church to other youth in the community at large. Secondly, the examples listed in the prophetic column were, or will have to be, intentionally implemented with a community

focus. Finally, the examples listed in the prophetic column were, or may have to be, initiated by educators who are committed to school-church partnerships. Understanding how educators influence the level of black church activism, as it relates to education, provides the foundation for my response to my third, and final, research question.

**Question 3: How can the efforts of black churches inform education leaders in developing faith-based partnership with black churches?**

School leaders who read this study should pay special attention to Table 6, which documents the level of activism for each program currently, or potentially, offered by the church. This table provides an overview of the types of programs that can build a community culture of academic success (Wynn, 2012). According to Wynn (2012), black churches play a key role in creating a community script that communicates the importance of academics. Such messages create a culture of academic success in which high achievement is valued and rewarded as much as other extracurricular activities, such as sports (Wynn, 2012). Today, black students are in urgent need of an educational intervention and the modern day black church is in a position to address this urgent need (Gaines, 2010). Study participants voiced their understanding of the role the black church has to reach out into the community. When asked, “Do you believe church programs should be offered to non-members”; the study participants unanimously replied, “Yes”. For example, Sally, a member of Gospel Baptist Church, stated:

YES! Because if you exclude them and just say only church members you are leaving out so many kids that could possible gain something from our choir to our activities that we have, like the Summit. If you just say church members those are children who are constantly getting; but there are those that are hungry to get the

things that those kids [youth church members] are getting; so, no, I don't think they [youth non-church members] should be excluded.

A male participant from the Gospel Baptist Church youth focus-group stated, "I think it should be open to anyone who would like to participate because the church is supposed to be helpful and those other kids need things too". A female from the same focus group shared:

I think it should be open as well because the church is supposed to be about openness and not just like a cult. I know when I was younger I went to another church because they offered tutoring sessions because I needed help in a class. So, I went to another church for help.

Kerry, a member of Gospel Baptist Church, echoed the concept of the church not functioning as a cult, when she shared:

Yes! Because I feel that the church is a resource for the community. So, I don't believe in the church just being like a social club where you have to have membership in order to get the benefits. I feel like the church should be a resource for the community. So, yes you have members; but we should also be doing outreach into the community and pulling those youth in.

The church members from both Gospel Baptist Church and Worship Baptist Church do not believe that black church should function as social club that limit services to members only.

The pastors who participated in this study shared similar responses, which also indicate that the leadership of black churches supports efforts that address the needs of church members as well as non-church members. Although Pastor Clarence responded positively; his response was also tied into his views of the church's participation in the

anti-suspension program and his concerns that non-members using the church should understand the purpose of the church. He stated, “Yes, within that we have to be careful that they respect our edifice; the things we’re providing for them and that they realize that we are unequivocally a church”. Pastor Albert, youth pastor at Worship Baptist Church, and Pastor Daniel, senior pastor at Worship Baptist Church, also responded positively.

Pastor Albert shared:

Absolutely! Absolutely, yes! Church programs definitely should be. The job of the church is not just to reach the people inside these four walls; but it’s to reach the people outside these four walls, the world, the city, the region, the counties, the states. So definitely we have to do what we call evangelism outreach. Even if it’s not a Christian program it should be expanded beyond the four walls of members in this church.

Similarly, Pastor Daniel shared:

Absolutely! I think the church should be, as I see it, should be like the hub of a wheel. It should be a place that anybody from anywhere can gravitate to get help it should be a place not restricted to membership because I think that in and of itself shows prejudice it shows loftiness and a kind of moral and spiritual segregation that I don’t think the church should participate in.

Like their congregation members, the pastors who participated in this study do not believe that church membership should be a prerequisite for participant in church services and/or programs. Unfortunately, the willingness to extend church services to anyone regardless of church affiliation is often done from a pastoral stance because the only people who will participate will be those who were at church on the day an announcement regarding the service/program was made. Although, study participants overwhelmingly agreed that church services should be extended to non-members,

additional discussion is needed to determine what steps are needed to move a church from a pastor focus to a prophetic focus.

As documented by the pastoral activities listed in Table 6, and supported in other research, black churches have the desire to address issues that center on education (Barrett, 2010; Mitchell, 2010, Wynn, 2012). However, in many cases black church goers may not know the scope of the problem. Therefore, school leaders seeking to forge school-church partnerships must be willing to contact their local black church and share information with the church's leadership regarding the need for school-church collaboration. As revealed through this study, educators are a catalyst that moves a black church from pastoral activism to prophetic activism. Therefore, the efforts of the two selected black churches inform education leaders that the development of school-church partnerships must be a two-way street in which both educators and black church goers come to the table with an understanding of the role each plays in the development of a successful partnership. In Chapter V, I spotlighted the services and programs currently implemented by black church goers. Through my discussion of prophetic activism and the conditions that foster black church activism I have detailed how the inspiration of an educator may cause a pastoral form of activism to transform into a prophetic form of activism. In the section that follows I will provide simple recommendations to school leaders and black church leaders seeking to form a prophetic school-church partnership.

### **Recommendations for Leadership**

As highlighted in Chapter V, leadership in the black church should be viewed through a lens that acknowledges the significant role and influence all members, particularly black women, have within the church. Likewise, 21<sup>st</sup> century school leadership acknowledges the contributions all stakeholders bring to the educational setting. Therefore, the recommendations listed below are not made directly to the person in the position of school principal or senior pastor; but are directed to those individuals who will share responsibility for the implementation of school-church partnerships.

**Know the mission of your institution and the organization you wish to partner with.** My review of the literature in Chapter II, along with data from black church goers, reveal hesitation from both black church leaders and school leaders when it comes to forming school-church partnerships. The literature reveals that school leaders are concerned over the legal and constitutional dimensions of state-religious partnerships (Ryden, 2003). The data from this study reveals that black church leaders are receptive to school-church partnerships; but are concerned that secular institutions, such as public schools, may disregard their Christian focus. The best way to combat such fears and hesitation is to participate in authentic dialogue (Wynn, 2012). Wynn (2012) states that when school leaders and black church leaders understand how the missions of their two institutions complement each other; such understandings enhance the possibility that exists for school-church partnership. I agree. Therefore, my first recommendation to school leaders and black church leaders is to know the mission of their institution as well as the organization with which they wish to form a partnership. For example, many black



churches have developed mission statements that document the church's goal to build spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional capacity (Wynn, 2012). Based on this, a school seeking to form a partnership with a black church could easily tie into goals that address the intellectual needs of African American youth.

**Understand how funding can impact the partnership.** Some of the black church goers who participated in this study indicated that schools and churches needed to form partnerships to provide programs to the communities in which they are anchored. Information contained in the literature and as reveal in this study illustrate that black church goers are able to generate funding when their efforts are supported by the senior pastor (Gite, 1993). However, I would caution school leaders not to look at black churches as a source of extra funding. School leaders have to remember that black churches are volunteer institutions and their funding is dependent upon the black church goers who elect to provide financial support, most of whom are women. Although, the results of this study alluded to the fact that black church goers do commit financial resources to initiatives that address the education of African American students; school leaders seeking to form school-church partnerships need to review their district's policies regarding program funding to determine what they can bring to the table as well. For example, schools that have Title I status have a directive regarding spending money on parent programs. If it is determined that a local black church has a successful parenting program; a school leader may want to see how his/her Title I funding could be used to make the program available to the parents of their school. If allowed, a school principal could host programs, using school funds, at a local church in an effort to provide an

environment that may make some parents feel more comfortable as compared to the school building. Therefore, my second recommendation to school principals is to be aware of how the school can financially support school-church partnerships. My second recommendation to black church leaders is to understand that schools may need financial support in order to implement programs that directly benefit the educational needs of African American schools. In summary, to both the school leader and black church leader – do not let money serve as the guiding motivation to a school-church partnership. Both the school leader and black church leader should go into a school-church partnership with the focus of building the achievement of African American students; not solely seeking ways to drain resources from the partnering institution.

**Take it “One Day at a Time.”** For those of you familiar with Christian/Gospel music you will recognize the heading from a familiar gospel song that states, “One day at a time Sweet Jesus that is all I’m asking for you” (Wikin & Kristofferson, 1974). As the researcher of this study, I am using the lyrics of this song to remind both school and black church leaders to work on one partnership at a time. It is my belief that this recommendation is more imperative to school leaders than black church leaderships. The results of this study suggest that, unlike the black churches of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, today’s black churches often do not collaborate with each other on issues that address the academic success of African American students (Gaines, 2010). For example, during his interview, Pastor Daniel, senior pastor at Worship Baptist Church, stated he wished that schools would underwrite more programs that are held in the African American community, in particular – black churches. However, had he been

in collaboration with Gospel Baptist Church he would have known that the school system does underwrite programs that are held at churches. Likewise, one of the youth from Gospel Baptist Church stated that she wished the churches would donate money to schools. Had she been aware of the services provided at Worship Baptist Church; she would have known that black churches do provide money to schools. According to Gaines (2010), black church leaders must put aside their theological differences that create division and learn to work together on social issues, such as the underachievement of African American students in today's public schools. As a black church member, I have personal experiences regarding how religious practice varies from one black church to the other. Therefore, my third recommendation to school leaders is to pick one black church to move into partnership. I know as educators, we tend to want all that we can get for our students. However, if the theological underpinning of two or more churches differs greatly; to form multiple school-church partnerships may be more of a hindrance than a help. No school principal wants to find himself/herself in the middle of religious indifference. As a part of my third recommendation, which is to choose the one black church to partner with, I also suggest that the school leader do his/her research to determine which church is currently offering programs and services that could be of immediate benefit to their students and has a mission that could be easily supported by a school-church partnership.

My third recommendation to black church leaders is twofold as well. First, black church leaders must find ways to come together within their own black church communities. The black church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must function as an educative space

and work across denominational lines to form a collective unit, like the one present during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which addresses the underachievement of African American students (Gaines, 2010). The current performance of African American students in today's public schools is the civil rights issue of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (McCray et al., 2010). The black church leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must recognize the urgency in the circumstances regarding black student achievement. These leaders must put aside their own egos and work collaborative within black church communities to combine resources that will collectively address and positively impact the teaching and learning opportunities available to African American students. The second part of my third recommendation to black church leaders is that, like school leaders, black church leaders must determine the one school-church partnership that is more suitable for their church. Unlike my recommendation to school leaders, I am not suggesting that black church leaders seek one school to build partnership. However, black church leaders need to determine the one type of partnership that is best suited for their congregation. Such partnerships could involve offering the same one service to multiple schools (e.g., Lunch Buddies); it could involve working with one school system on a particular need (e.g., forming and implementing an African American Parental Advisory Team); or it could entail the use of church facilities for one program (e.g., anti-suspension program). Understanding that black churches are volunteer institutions, black church leaders have to ensure that the prophetic endeavors initiated by the church do not overwhelm the volunteers who will be responsible for the implementation (Price, 2008).

**Acknowledge the negative impact race has on the student-teacher relationship between African American students and public school teachers.** This is the theme that has been embedded throughout this study. Through my review of the literature and the voices of study participants, I have addressed how public institutions have historically discriminated against African Americans. Furthermore, King, Houston, and Middleton (2001) explain that due to race, some educators have come to believe that visible difference, such as the color of one's skin, are forever linked to differences in mental abilities and that such hierarchical differences account for the underachievement of the disadvantage student. Critical race theorists argue that such beliefs fail to acknowledge that problems of race are not linked to individuals but are systemic and the solutions have to be found in the structures that perpetrate the superiority of one race over another (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Delanty, 2009; Farr, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

According to King et al. (2001), school curriculum tends to marginalize the contributions of people of color. With this said school leaders must understand the climate and culture of their schools and determine how the black church can help educators build an understanding and appreciation of black culture. The literature highlights how the adult, black church goers are able to build social capital in the youth who regularly attend black religious programs (Barrett, 2010; McCray et al., 2010; Yosso, 2005). The services and religious experiences provided by adult, black church goers help African American youth build social capital as well as highlight other forms of capital that are not typically recognized in the public school.

The various forms of capital that African American children bring with them to the classroom further emphasizes the need to restructure our public institutions in a manner that acknowledges and values the culture experiences of all students. Unfortunately, in many public schools the concept of capital pluralism is nonexistent (Yosso, 2005). . Therefore, my fourth recommendation to school leaders is to seek out opportunities to observe African American students, who are enrolled in your schools, in their religious settings. Based on the information contained in the literature and confirmed through my observations this will provide an opportunity to see the richness of the African American culture (Barrett, 2010; McCrayet.al, 2010; Yosso, 2005).

In addition to enlightening their own views regarding the giftedness of African American children; when school leaders attend events that are held in religious settings their presence communicates support, which could help improve school-community relationships. My fourth recommendation to black church leaders is to provide opportunities for African American youth to use their academic and leadership skills within the religious services (e.g., quoting scriptures, reading announcements). In addition, black church leaders must be willing to open up their services to school leaders and educators seeking to understand black religion and the capacity of black religion to positively impact the development of social capital.

**Delegate Leadership.** My fifth, and final, recommendation to school leaders, as well as black church leaders, is to realize that you cannot do anything on your own. In 2001, Jim Collins authored *Good to Great*, which highlighted how organizations triumph over adversities to sustained performance. As it relates to this study, the question is,

“How can school leaders and black church leaders work together to move the black church from pastoral to prophetic?” As previously documented, the current acts of prophetic activism documented in Table 6 were all initiated by educators. Although, I am concerned that four out of five of the events were initiated by schools principals; I remain hopeful that when school leaders and black church leaders begin to delegate leadership to accomplished educators within their schools and churches the result will be school-church partnerships that produce events that are created with the prophetic intention of addressing a community need. Therefore, my final recommendation to school leaders is to seek opportunities to empower your teachers to take the lead in building school-church partnerships. For example, if you have educators, in your school, who regularly attend a black church you need to speak with them to see what role they could play in fostering a relationship between their place of worship and the school. However, remember my third recommendation and try to focus your efforts on one church. As it relates to black church leaders, you should provide an opportunity for educators who are also congregation members to share their concerns and ideas regarding school-church partnerships. When there is shared leadership in our schools and black churches the results of such leadership could lead to improved academic achievement for African American students.

### **Links to North Carolina Standards**

As a North Carolina educator I was committed to conducting a study that would address the needs of school leaders in my home state. As a result of this study, I would like to document how my five recommendations address three of the standards found in the *North Carolina School Executive: Principal and Assistant Principal Evaluation*

*Process* (McRel, 2009). The first of my five recommendations aligns to Standard 1, which is the need for strategic leadership. According to the McRel (2009) document, “the leader creates a climate of inquiry that challenges the school community to continually re-purpose itself by building on its core values and beliefs about its preferred future and then developing a pathway to reach it” (p. 7). In order for school leaders to be strategic in the efforts to build school-church partnerships they must first understand the mission and vision of the school and seek ways to align their mission and vision to community resources, such as the black church.

My fourth recommendation aligns to Standard 3, which addresses the need for cultural leadership. Based on the McRel (2009) document:

...a school’s culture contributes to the exemplary performance of the school. School executives must support and value the traditions, artifacts, symbols and positive values and norms of the school and community that result in a sense of identity and pride upon which to build a positive future ... Cultural leadership implies understanding the school as people in it each day, how they came to their current state, and how to connect with their traditions in order to move them forward to support the school’s efforts to achieve individual and collective goals (p. 9).

School leaders must acknowledge that their African American students are included in the “people” in the school. The culture and experiences of this group of people has to be acknowledged and included as an important component of the school’s overall culture. However, many critical race theorists argue that this is a hard task because our public institutions have been structured to understate the power of the privilege (California State University, 1999; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delanty, 2009; Delgado & Stefanie, 2001; Farr, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Powell Pruitt (2004) many educators



tend to view children of color through a discourse of deficit. Yosso (2005) states that the actions of black church goers are needed to help build and celebrate alternate forms of capital that may not be celebrated within the school setting. Therefore, school leaders should seek to use resources, such as the black church, that provide experience that counter any views of deficits that may be a part of the schools culture due to systemic racism and lack of cultural understanding on the part of educators linked to the school.

My final example of how this study aligns to the *North Carolina School*

*Executive: Principal and Assistant Principal Evaluation Process* (McRel, 2009), can be found in Standard 4, which address human resource leadership. According to the McRel (2009) document:

The school executive must engage and empower accomplished teachers in a distributive leadership manner, including support of teachers in day-to-day decisions such as discipline, communication with parents, and protecting teachers from duties that interfere with teaching ... [the school executive] creates processes for teachers to assume leadership and decision making roles within the school ... (p. 10)

As highlighted in this study, a black church is able to offer prophetic activism when initiatives that address the academic needs of students are inspired by concerned educators. The formation of school-church partnerships cannot and must not rely solely on the shoulders of the school leaders. School leaders must empower teachers and other staff members to take the lead in generating ideas that could foster school-church partnerships. Such empowerment provides opportunities for teachers and other staff members to experience firsthand the type of planning and organization required for successful program implementation. Additionally, such empowerment could provide a

means for school teachers and other staff members to use their passions to form community partnerships that directly benefit the students they teach. The need for such distributive leadership is my fifth recommendation.

During his interview, Pastor Daniel provided a statement that exemplifies the need for distributive leadership. He stated:

I think there has to be, again, a mindset by our public educators that public education can be, should be, and MUST be education of excellence; we have regulated public education to the point of a 'get by education'; if we can just get 'em by; just pass them on; get them to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and they can't read. "I [a teacher] don't care if they can't comprehend". It seems to me that even with what we are doing here [referring to the interview and the focus of the study]; I have a real struggle in American education as opposed to in Europe. In Europe, if a kid is not college material and he or she wants to develop a trade they start him on a path in about the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and then by the time he graduates or she graduates they can go to that career whatever their career is and not be labeled a failure. What happens in America if a kid is not college material; he is considered dumb, he's considered a candidate for prison - he's all of that kind of stuff. And there still has to be somebody to lay bricks, run electrical wires, somebody has to care for the computers, somebody has to build them, somebody has to build cars. The problem I have with public education is it seems to be a pass through endeavor rather than a preparatory exercise.

Pastor Daniel's statement illustrates the need for school leader and educators to move away from the status quo. Throughout our interview, Pastor Daniel demonstrated passion and concern regarding the current state of education for African American youth attending public schools. The passion he shared underscores that black church goers are aware of the civil rights issue of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is the underachievement of African American students (McCray et al., 2010). As emphasized by Pastor Daniel, no longer can schools and school systems continue to address the problem using failed techniques from the past. Today's school leaders must put aside their egos and effectively

seek and utilize out-of-the school resources to address the learning needs of African American school-aged youth enrolled in our public schools. The purpose of my study was to outline how the black church could be used as a tool to address the underachievement of African American students.

### **Final Conclusion: Linking Theory & Practice**

This study was based on a conceptual framework that drew upon the centrality of race and racism in American society, social learning theory, and the concept of prophetic activism. The centrality of race and racism was used to provide an answer to my first research question, which was: “Why do black churches become engaged in social issues, such as the education of African American youth attending public schools”. The centrality of race and racism comes out of critical race theory, which places emphasis on race and views racism as a system that understates the power of privilege (California State University, 1999; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delanty, 2009; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Farr, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Through their participation in this study, black church goers revealed that in the public education system a lack of understanding on the part of some educators regarding race has negatively impacted the student-teacher relationship between African American students and public school teachers. As it relates to the study, critical race theorists would argue, that the giftedness African American children bring to their school settings is overlooked due to systemic racism that places white in a position of superiority and normal and black in a position of inferiority and abnormal. However scholars, such as McCray et al. (2010) and Yosso (2005) challenge educators to see the various forms of giftedness each child brings to the educational

setting. Black church goers understanding of race places them in a position to play a major role in helping African American youth understand how African American values and collective principles form notions of community uplift which lead to an increase in social capital.

The second body of theory that provided the framework for this study was social learning theory (Bandura, 1986). This theory was used to answer my second research question, which was: “How do black churches address the social and academic needs of African American school-aged youth in their communities”. A review of the literature revealed that black churches have the resources necessary to socialize African American students for school success by offering programs that highlight the importance of social and emotional development as well as cognitive skills and abilities (Martin & McAdoo, 2007; Durlak & Weissberg, 2010; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). According to Sparks (2011) students who participate in activities offered in a social setting, such as the black churches, show an improvement in their social and cognitive performances.

Social learning theorists address how one obtains the values, beliefs, and actions viewed as appropriate for the system in which they live (Baron et al., 1997). The black church goers who participated in this study revealed that motivation and modeling are used to instill the values, beliefs, and actions adult, black church goers deem appropriate for their communities as well as in the public schools. Barrett emphasizes (2010) just “being there”, with “there” being black religious involvement, can provide skills that enhance social capital and thusly improve student performance. Through their participation in black religion, African American youth are provided services and

programs that address their needs for acceptance and belonging as well as their need for power and status.

As highlighted in the literature and confirmed in this study, we cannot overlook the role black women have in the black church as it relates to the educational services and programs offered to African American youth (Anderson, 2004; Gilkes, 2001; Goldman, 1990; Higginbotham, 1993; Toinette, 1995; Wiggins, 2005). The data shows that some black church goers yearn to return to a time that collaboration between the home, the school, and the church was the norm. If we are to return to such a time, we will first have to rely on the role black women have in both the home and the church. As mothers, black women have firsthand knowledge of the negative experiences African American youth encounter in their public schools settings. As black church goers, black women understand the collective power they have within their churches to influence decisions and implement programs. Since black women make up the majority of black church membership and church goers any efforts to develop school-church partnerships will rely heavily upon the volunteer service the black woman offers to her church.

The final concept that guided this study was the concept of prophetic activism (McDaniel, 2008; McRoberts, 2003; Swartz, 2008, West, 1982). Prophetic activism refers to faith-based activism that is intentionally designed by black church goers to reach outside the church and better the community in which it is anchored (McDaniel, 2008; McRoberts, 2003). The concept of prophetic activism was used to answer my third research question, which was: “How can the efforts of black churches inform education leaders in developing faith-based partnerships with black churches?”. The black church

goers who participated in this study revealed actions that were both pastoral and prophetic in nature. However, since I agree with McRoberts (2003) that the highest form of activism is prophetic activism, it was important for me to identify the conditions that moved a black church from pastoral to prophetic when it came to educational initiatives. What I found, as a result of this study, is that a black church can move from pastoral to prophetic when an educator provides the inspiration for the service or program.

As I explained in Chapter II, McRoberts' (2003) focus on the impact that church membership and attendance has on black church activism is an extension of the widely accepted views of prophetic activism, which categorize this level of activism by the extent in which the church's involvement leads to economic and political empowerment of African Americans (Barnes, 2004). However, using McRoberts' (2003) definition of prophetic activism leads to additional research that could be conducted to determine the extent to which constructs, such as the socio-economic status of the church's various members, hinder or promote activism that is designed to address whole community needs. In other words, is prophetic activism in today's black church motivated out of a concern regarding social injustices that can be mainly attributed to race, such as the underachievement of African American students? Is prophetic activism mainly motivated out of a concern regarding the socio-economic status of church members? Or, do intersections of racial and class issue motivate church goers' activism? As it relates to this study, McRoberts' (2003) description of prophetic activism provides a simple lens educators (and others) can use to determine the extent to which partnership with a black

church may be formed due to the church's willingness to serve both church members and non-members.

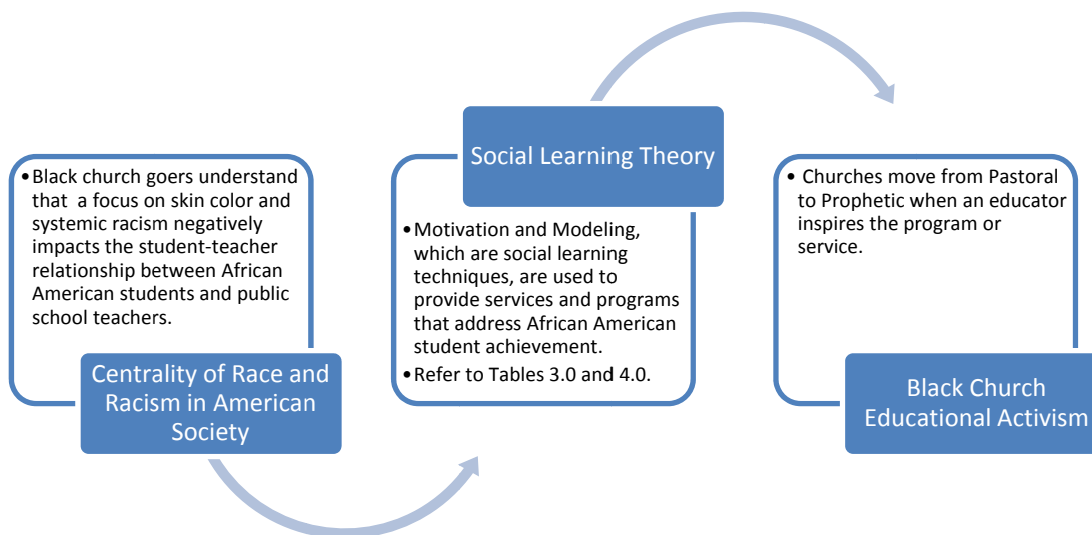
As documented in Table 3, black church goers do provide many services that address the academic needs of African American students. However, as documented in Table 6 many of these services and programs are offered at the pastoral level. Although, I do not expect any educator (or church goer) to take on the full responsibility of developing a school-church partnership, I am mindful that an educator may have to provide the insight into the severity of a particular academic problem faced by African American students. Black church goers may only be analyzing a particular phenomenon through the perspectives of the youth members who attend their church, which limits the scope in which black church goers are able to address academic issues. Therefore, school leaders and educators seeking to form a school-church partnership must understand that they will not be able to sit back and take a passive role in the partnership.

Based on my findings, I have created a visual, Figure 1, which provides an overview of how the data collected during this study aligns to the conceptual framework that guided my work. As I bring my work to a close, I must acknowledge that I am proud that my study can be used by both school leaders and black church leaders to build collaborative relationship. More importantly I am proud that the data collected reveal unanticipated themes, which lend themselves to additional researcher into the role black church activism has in African American student achievement. For instance, this study leads to additional research related to: (1) the potential and deliberate move of some black church leaders from a strictly African American-based focus that emphasizes the

role the black church plays when addressing systemic forms of racism and how such shifts impact the educational services provided by the black church to African American students; (2) understanding how black women, without the title of senior pastor, are able to implement and support programs that directly impact the achievement of African American students and the gratification or frustration these women experience in their informal leadership or other volunteer roles; and finally, (3) the structural characteristics of a black church that prevent or hinder collaboration with other black churches in efforts that address African American student achievement.

Although many questions about black church activism that focuses on African American student achievement remain, as highlighted in Figure 1.0, the conceptual framework I developed for this study effectively addresses how black church activism is used to socialize African American students for public school. Figure 1.0, which is on the next page, provides a visual that illustrates that: (1) the centrality of race and racism addresses a significant part of the “why?” behind black church activism; (2) that social learning theory addresses the “how?” of black church activism; and (3) prophetic activism can be used to describe the important role educators have in school-black church partnerships



**Figure 1****Visual Representation of the Conceptual Framework**

When there is an understanding of how systemic racism negatively impact African American student achievement; black church goers are able to use motivation and modeling to offer services and programs that provide academic support to African American youth, black church goers. As revealed through this study, black churches currently provide programs that address the academic needs of black youth who regularly participate in black religion. However, when educators are able to initiate programs with black churches the service or program inspired by the educator, but offered by the black church, can become prophetic in nature and can reach black youth who are not tied to the black church through church attendance. As I close this study, I am reminded that Gaines (2010) states:

To say the ultimate fate of black student achievement rests solely in the hands of the black church would be a gross exaggeration. Such a statement would ignore the numerous variables that influence student achievement and place on the black church a tremendous burden that is neither warranted nor feasibly manageable by a single institution. However, what the data continues to strongly show is that many black students are in dire need of an educational intervention. (p. 377)

The black church cannot address the educational needs of African American youth on its own. However, history highlights the black church's capacity to affect social change. The black church is a readily available out-of-the-school resource that should be utilized by today's public school leaders to effectively address the educational needs of African American students. When the senior pastor and black church goers have a shared vision for African American academic improvement, they are able to generate the resources needed to implement academic services and programs that address African American student performance.

### **Reflection**

As I stated in Chapter I, the most pressing challenge facing our nation is discovering effective tools that public schools can use to help all of America's children meet the standards necessary to live, learn, work, communicate, and be productive citizens in today's highly technological, global community of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Jones, 2002). As a black mother, black church member, and black educator I went into this study with the belief that black churches had within them resources that could be utilized by public schools to effectively prepare African American youth for global citizenry as described by Jones (2002). I began this study with several thoughts regarding what school-church partnership meant for school leaders and black church leaders. These

thoughts were meshed into what became the conceptual framework for this study. I have to admit, I went into this study, not knowing how the data that would be collected, the conceptual framework, and the literature would all fit together – or even if it would fit together. However, because of their willingness to be a part of this study, the study participants have helped me reveal the richness that can be found in black churches. They have helped me to showcase the services and programs that are currently available in black churches that specifically address the educational needs of African American youth. Furthermore, their willingness to share their black church experiences has helped to reveal the key role educators play in fostering actions that move the black church from pastoral to prophetic. As I sit here and type the ending to this dissertation, I'm both pleased and saddened that this work has come to an end. However, I fully embrace the new questions that this study has generated and the potential my work has to impact additional studies on school-black church partnerships. I am forever grateful to the participants of this study for their willingness to participate in my learning process.

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## APPENDIX A

### OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Date:					
Church Involved:					
Start Time:		Ending Time:		Total Observing Time:	

Descriptive Notes:	Reflective Notes (consideration of links to education, family and communities):
<p><i>General: Provide general description of the atmosphere to include: What is going on? Who is involved? Where is the event being held? Is the location significant? Why or why not? How many attendees? Is copy of event announcement available? If applicable include in document review. Impression of participants as activity begins.</i></p>	
Sketch of Setup (include observer location):	
Actual Event Start Time:	
0 – 10 minute observations	
11 – 20 minute observations	
21 – 30 minute observations	
31 – 40 minute observations	
41 – 50 minute observations	
51 – 60 minute observations	
61 – 70 minute observations	
71 – 80 minute observations	
81 – 90 minute observations	
91 – 100 minute observations	

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date:

Place:

Time:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

*Provide general information about the interviewee, to include: church position (if applicable), family role (student, parent, other), general description of physical position during interview.*

(Discuss and obtained informed consent)

#### **Questions:**

1. Please describe your role in the church? How long have you been a member?
2. What attracted you to the church and what has kept you here as a member?
3. What do you think is the status of public education for African American youth?
4. What do you think is the status of African American student performance overall?
5. How does race impact the academic performance of African American youth attending public school?
6. Why should black churches become involved with the academic needs of African American youth attending public schools?
7. How has this church implemented services/programs that address African American youth and their success in public schools?
8. How did you become aware of these services/programs?
9. How are these programs implemented?
10. What group/ministry/individual is responsible for the implementation?
11. What types of activities take place in these services/programs? Your role in these services/programs, if any?
12. Any differences in the roles of male and female church members?
13. How are non-church members informed of services/programs offered by the church?
14. Other than the services/programs the church is currently offering, are there other services/programs you feel the church should offer that directly address the academic achievement of African Americans in public schools?
15. To whom should I talk to if I want to find out more about this church's involvement with the academic needs of African American youth attending public schools?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add?

(Thank participations for their participation. Assure confidentiality of responses and potential for future follow-up interviews. Also, explain how a focus group will be used to provide the findings of the study and offer a chance for participant feedback.)

**APPENDIX C**

**DOCUMENT REVIEW GUIDELINES**

<b>Consideration:</b>	Type of Document:	Notes:
	Date of Document:	
	Published by the church?	
1	Does the publication/document include information from non-church members? If so, what and how?	
2	How does the document specifically address the academic needs of African American youth attending public schools? <i>Provide direct quotes.</i>	
3	Is race mentioned as a construct that impacts public education and/or African American student achievement in public schools?	
4	Does the document detail how services are provided to non-church members?	
5	Is it evident that the publication/document was created for members and non-members as well as non-church goers?	
6	Does the document provide examples of the types of activities African American youth can participate in enhance/learn behaviors for school success?	
7	What group/ministry/individual is responsible for the activities that directly speak to African American student achievement in public schools?	
8	What group/ministry/individual published the publication/document?	